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Letters on the divinity of  
Christ







LETTERS

ON THE

DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

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LETTERS  
ON THE  
DIVINITY OF CHRIST,

ADDRESSED TO  
THE REV. E. CHANNING,  
IN ANSWER TO HIS SERMON "ON THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY,"  
PREACHED AND PUBLISHED AT BALTIMORE,

BY  
MOSES STUART,  
ASSOCIATE PROF. OF SAC. LIT. IN THEOL. SEMR. ANDOVER.

WITH AN  
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,  
BY  
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MDCCCXXXVI.



## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

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ONE of the strongest indirect proofs of the truth of the mediatorial plan of salvation may readily be drawn from the conduct of its enemies, from the first century of its promulgation down to the present period. Leaving out of sight the darings of open and avowed infidelity, and not bringing into account those efforts which the strong hand of power, armed with the scorpion-whip of persecution, has in various ages put forth for the annihilation of "the faith once delivered to the saints," the proof to which I refer is sufficiently deducible from the current of heresy flowing through the Church, which, however it may have changed its character, according to the fancies and caprices of men, has, nevertheless, coursed its way to an original and defined point, from which it has sought to empty itself upon the fair surface of the revealed truth of God; to tarnish what it could not invalidate; and to perplex what it could not honestly reject.



If the spirit of heresy (the offspring of the Evil One) had not regarded the whole system as of divine origin and authority, it never would have condescended to the attack of any of its parts; but, treating it altogether with silent scorn, would have reserved its force to be directed against some future system that should be better able to support a claim to such origin and authority. If, on the other hand, the Gospel system had not been of divine origin and authority, but yet had possessed such warrants, either internal or external, as rendered it on any account a suitable object for the assaults of heresy, surely every blow would have been fatal, and every breath of fluctuating opinion would have had its invalidating influence; and long ago the base imposture would have been torn piecemeal, and each fragment would have been flung by its specific opponents on the waters of oblivion; or the whole would have been exhibited on the page of the historian, as an anatomized and dissected carcase, affording only a demonstration of the depravity of falsehood, and of the weakness and wickedness of its originators and supporters. But how is the fact? The spirit of heresy has been making its assaults upon the vitals of Christianity from the time of the DOCETÆ, who first denied the substantial humanity, and of the EBIONITES, who first stumbled at the divinity of the *Logos* of the sacred Scriptures, down to the last showy though shadowy efforts of the modern Socinian; and yet the consistency and integrity of the general body of revealed truth, together with all its parts,

remains undeniable, undiminished, and unchanged : and though the scalpel of the heretic may have scarred over the beauty of the surface, yet the dissected system, whilst triumphantly asserting its divine origin and sanction, has demonstrated the beauty as well as the immutability of eternal truth, and the glory of the foundation on which it rests : and thus the grand system of Gospel salvation, the essential feature of which is the positive though mystical reunion of the natures of God and Man in the person of Christ Jesus, or, in other words, “the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” continues to be the substance of the faith of the true Church ; whilst a denial of its essential, and, by consequence, of its collateral and dependent features is persevered in by a comparatively small, though by no means harmless, minority,\* whose ratiocinative faculties render them too elevated to stoop for the truth, and too proud to receive it, when freely offered by its divine Author, unless he will first forego his own preroga-

\* If Socinians are asked whether their sect is a large and increasing one, they will probably answer in the affirmative. If they prove what they affirm, yet the sect is at present very inconsiderable, when compared with the vast body of all denominations, who, however they may differ on other points of less moment, yet agree in holding as an essential the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity. The dimensions of Socinianism may appear large, when the term is made to comprehend every thing that lies between the bounds of absolute Trinitarianism and undissembled Deism ; and it is with much of this latitude that the terms Socinianism and Unitarianism are to be used. But Mr. Belsham, in his Letter to the Bp. of London, (p.48,) nevertheless speaks of the sect in his time as being “*few in number, unfashionable, unpopular, despised, hated, calumniated, and everywhere spoken against.*”

tive, and come down, in all particulars, to the level of that platform on which finite understandings are, from their very nature, compelled to act. Numerous as heresies have been from the beginning, yet surely we may boldly affirm that there is not one of them, whatever pain it may have occasioned the Church for a time, but has revealed a gem where it would have fixed a blot, and manifested a glory where it would have invoked contempt; and thus we are graciously led to see how wisely the Author of the mediatorial scheme has overruled the caviller, and the gainsayer, and the wise according to the wisdom of this world, so as that, upon the collected fragments of exposed error, His own unchangeable truth might have a wider field for its foundation.

Leaving the consideration of heresies in general, I confine my few introductory remarks to *Socinianism* or *Unitarianism*,\* with a view to prepare the mind of the inquiring reader for a more cordial perusal of the following pages, which bear on them an impress of sterling worth, to which I cannot hope to add any thing.

\* The term "*Socinian*" is usually objected to by those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity; and they prefer "*Unitarian*," because, as constantly explained by themselves, it signifies a worshipper of One God; and thus they use it, as if the worship of One God were peculiar to themselves, and not common to all Trinitarians. The principal Socinian writers, in their choice and adoption of the latter term, seem as if they wished their readers to understand, that the point in dispute between them and Trinitarians is, whether there be *Three Gods* or only *One*; and, as if they would have them infer, that while they are holding the true light, all Christendom is lapped in the darkness and error and impiety of Polytheism. This view of the matter is as unfair as it is untrue.

That the primitive Church of Christ ever looked upon an hypostatical union of the divine \* and

\* The primitive Church gathered its views of the great and fundamental doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, from the apostolic source, and transmitted it accordingly, as the writings of the fathers abundantly testify. With regard to the views entertained and promulgated by the Apostles, the Bp. of St. David's, in his *Tracts on the Divinity of Christ*, (p. 3.) thus forcibly remarks:—"Nothing but a belief in Christ's divinity, his omnipresent influence, and omnipotent power, could have induced his disciples and apostles to honour him with divine worship, and to endure the privations, indignities, and sufferings which they underwent for his sake. The divinity of Christ was not with them a 'speculative notion,' a 'disputable dogma,' as the Unitarians represent it, but a great practical principle, which influenced their whole conduct, and infused into their minds a fortitude and constancy which made them rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and death for his name. To die, and to be with Christ, they counted better than life. What things were gain, in a worldly sense, they counted loss for Christ; yea, they counted all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Their belief in Christ's divinity, their confidence in him as God, ever present to sustain them in their difficulties, was the governing principle of their minds through this life; and their trust in his atonement was the ground of their happiness in the next. They knew that the blood of bulls and of goats could not put away sin; and the inspired Psalmist had long before declared, that man was utterly unable to redeem his brother. But in Christ, who *was with God, and was God*; who *was over all, God blessed for ever, their great God and Saviour*; *God manifest in the flesh, who was made flesh, and came in the flesh*, that he might, by his death, be a *propitiation for the sins of mankind*; in Him they trusted, as a Saviour, "able to save to the uttermost all who should come to God by him." Their belief in that truth, which Christ himself declared, which his contemporaries testified, proclaimed, and arraigned, as blasphemy, and for which Christ was crucified; which the Apostles preached and recorded; which the primitive church received, and transmitted to succeeding generations; was their warrant for the reception of the other great doctrine, which their sins and imperfections, and their inability to save themselves, had rendered necessary for their salvation. Christ died for the sins of mankind, not because the infinite malignity of sin required a sacrifice of infinite value, but because no sinful creature, and therefore no man, could by his death atone for the sins of others. Still the Socinian, rejecting the doctrine of man's total depravity, and with it the need, and therefore the truth, of the atonement; and



human natures in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as the essential characteristic of the plan of human salvation through a mediator, and as being the clearly revealed truth of God, is beyond all dispute ; and certainly a belief in, and a worship of, a triune Godhead is coeval with the planting and first propagation of Christianity : nor is it less certain that though the simplicity of the doctrine of the Trinity, viewed as a matter for faith to embrace, rather than for demonstration to develope, may have been somewhat affected by the feeble though well-meant attempts at demonstration, which some of its most zealous adherents have made ; yet, practically, the same views precisely are entertained of it in the Church now, as were embraced and promulgated by the primitive Church.\* It holds

stripping the Saviour of all but his proper humanity and divine commission, refuses to render him the anciently-paid worship due to his divinity, though it is written, and cannot be gainsayed, " Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philip. ii. 9—11.) Alas, alas ! notwithstanding the clear declarations of God's Word, and the current testimony of the Church from the beginning, the Socinian seems to be gazing on vacancy ; and, trembling lest he should strike against the Scylla of Polytheism, dashes fatally against the Charybdis of infidelity.

\* In contradiction to the evidence gathered from antiquity, Socinians profess to found their opposition to the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, on its supposed novelty before the time of Justin Martyr, (A. D. 140,) although the heresies of the Docetæ and Ebionites, in the latter part of the first century, supply direct evidence (if there were no other) of the current reception of the doctrine of the Trinity by the primitive Church : for, had that doctrine been but a figment of the mind, springing up in the time of Justin Martyr, and not previously entertained as the basis of the true faith, how could



the same place. It claims and receives the same regard; and those who humbly adhere to it as being the revealed though inexplicable truth of God, could as well dispense with the centre of the solar system, as forego the divinity of the "Sun of righteousness," or seek to raise the structure of a christian hope on a foundation less than that

occasion have arisen for a questioning of the divinity of Christ by the Ebionites, and of his substantial humanity, by the Docetæ? This ground of opposition is futile in the extreme. It is certain, moreover, that the doctrine of the Trinity was firmly held from Justin Martyr's time downwards; and Tertullian expressly shows, that at that period baptism was administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "*Quum sub tribus et testatio fidei et sponsio salutis pignorentur, necessario adjicitur ecclesiæ mentio: quoniam ubi tres, id est, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus, ibi ecclesia, quæ trium corpus est—ablutione delictorum, quam fides impetrat, obsignata in Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto. Nam si in tribus stabit omne verbum, quanto magis, dum habemus per benedictionem eosdem arbitros fidei, quos et sponsores salutis, sufficit ad fiduciam spei nostræ etiam numeris nominum divinorum.*" (De Bap. c. vi.) In Justin Martyr, who was prior to Tertullian, and born soon after the death of St. John, we have a declaration of faith, distinctly mentioning the belief and worship of the three divine Persons of the Godhead. *Εκεινον τε (Πατερα) και τον παρ' αυτου Υιον ελθοντα και διδασκοντα ημας ταυτα,—Πνευμα τε το προφητικον, σεβομεθα και προσκυνουμεν.* (Apol. I. p. 47.) I will mention one more particular, in proof of what I have stated in the text; and it is this—that *Hymenæus*, bishop of Ælia, and other bishops of the Council of Antioch, declared the doctrine in question to be the faith handed down to their time (A. D. 270,) from the Apostles. Connected with this statement, it may be interesting to the reader to compare with this declaration the creed of the church of Ælia, as contained in the answers of catechumens, preserved in the catecheses of Cyril, bishop of Ælia. *Πιστευω εις ένα Θεον, &c.* "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; begotten of the Father before all worlds, very God, by whom all things were made; who was incarnate and made in the likeness of men, crucified and buried; who rose again from the dead on the third day, and sat on the right hand of God, and will come to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom

afforded by a triunity in the Godhead. But it is against this fundamental doctrine that the Socinian directs his shafts. He says he cannot comprehend; and he withholds his assent from the doctrine just because he cannot comprehend; while, in regard to matters of an inferior grade, he yields assent to phenomena which he cannot explain, and the

shall be no end; and in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who spake by the prophets; in one baptism of repentance, in the forgiveness of sins, and in one catholic Church, in the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting." See the *Observatio in Symb. Hierosolym.* in the Benedictine edition of the works of Cyrilus Hierosol. p. 79, &c.—I have given a translation of this creed at full length, so that, by comparing it with the Nicene Creed, the reader may see how "the faith once delivered to the saints" has been preserved in the Church, and held with simplicity from the apostolic times down to the present. The Bishop of St. David's remarks, that it is evident that the above creed was in use before the Nicene Creed, from the absence of the term *ὁμοουσιος*, and some other terms and titles belonging to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. This is important to be borne in mind. The creed of the church of Ælia was promulgated somewhere about A. D. 270: the Nicene Creed about A. D. 325. Should it still be contended that the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity was a novelty till the time of Justin Martyr, we are not without evidence to satisfy us, that instead of being a novel doctrine, it was held by the Hebrews; at least, whatever views they might entertain, peculiar to themselves, respecting the second person of the Trinity, they certainly admitted and held the idea of a plurality in the Godhead, both before and at the time of Christ's manifestation in the flesh. The inquiring reader may, on this interesting point, profitably consult ALLIX's *Judgment of the Jewish Church against the Unitarians*, ch. 9—11, 19—21: WITSIUS's *Judæus Christianizans*, pp. 319, 320; and also his *Dissertation De sacrosancta Trinitate ex scriptis et hypothesibus Judæorum*, (Utrajecti, 1661): PFEIFFER's *Critica Sacra*, cap. viii. ed. 1773; and GROTIUS *De Veritate Relig. Christianæ*, lib. v. § 21. If the doctrine of the Trinity be a "disputable dogma" or a "blind error," as Socinians would have us believe, it is marvellous that, unlike error in general, it should have been preserved from remote antiquity down to the present time, as the revealed truth of God, amidst the assaults and devices of heresy. It is rather too much, at this time, for human pride to exalt itself against a doctrine so founded and so received, just because it is not demonstrable by human ratiocination.

mysterious nature of which baffles all his penetration. Yet will he not admit that any just charge of inconsistency lies against him.

Although principles of a like complexion with those now held by Socinians, were entertained by a few in the first three centuries of the christian era, yet Socinianism is a plant of comparatively moderate growth. When the sun-light of the Reformation began to dawn upon Christendom, benighted as it had been by papal abominations and errors, Socinianism rose to cast, if it were possible, a shade over its brightness; and daring spirits were not wanting in laborious assiduity to set the dam of fatal error against the broad current of truth as it rolled forward. Various have been their fate and fortunes; and names which might otherwise have been embalmed in honour, and enrolled amidst the armies of the blessed, are now but memorials of human weakness, at which the christian historian gazes, and pauses, and weeps. They are gone to their account; but they have left a savour behind,—a token which many, alas! have received; and Socinianism has become the shadowy creed, in this and other countries, upon which hundreds have ventured to launch their immortal souls; a creed which would rob the Gospel of its good tidings, its Author of his glory, and salvation of the Saviour. Though, Proteus-like, Socinianism, in many of its collateral features, has been given to change with the ebb and flow of human opinion amongst its adherents, yet its daring denial of the divinity of the Son of God has con-

tinued to be the centre of the circle of their speculative theology, and the sandy foundation of a structure as impious as Babel, and as perishable. How soon the heaven-directed blow that shall fling it in ruins may descend, is known only to Him whose councils are secret. Whether it is to remain till the coming of the "Just One," and, hand-in-hand with reviving Papacy, to "vex the saints of the Most High," and wage a final warfare with the militant Church of Christ, is yet to be seen. This, to my mind, is the probable view of the matter.\*

\* Every thing that is not of Christ, is necessarily part of Anti-christ—"the man of sin;" and will be allowed to exalt itself against God and his Christ, and the Church militant, to the end, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ. There is a primary spirit of infidelity in the natural heart of man: there is a secondary spirit of infidelity engendered in the corruptions of the church of Rome; and these will ever be ready to coalesce, and form the man of sin to be revealed in the last times. Can Socinianism be less than a member of the man of sin?—In FABER'S *Chronology of the Sacred Calendar of Prophecy* (a production evincing great accuracy of observation) the author thus ventures to class the fulfilment of prophecy between the years 1815 and 1864.

1815. Political slaughter of Francic emperorship, or seventh head; consequent political death of the Roman beast. (Rev. xvii. 8.)—Sixth Vial. The downfall of the Ottoman empire probably began with the great insurrection in 1821; the kings of the East, perhaps the Jews. Revival of the Francic emperorship will be subsequent to the fall of the Ottoman empire. (Rev. xvii. 8.)—Going forth of the three unclean spirits; the kings of the earth wrought up to fury by the politico-theological agents of the Dragon, the beast and the false prophet; the gathering together of an unseemly mixture of blaspheming infidels and bigoted Romanists.

1864. Expiration of the seven prophetic times, or 2520 years, and of the times of the four great Gentile empires.

Viewing unfulfilled prophecy, and human calculations of times and seasons, which are in God's hand, with all necessary and



We of this generation shall, in all probability, be laid with our fathers in the dust, before the vast development of God's final purposes will be made ; but we can gather much from steadily watching the signs of the times,—much, with the inspired Word for our guide, tending to lead us to sober conclusions. But we have not so much to do with this question, as we have with the present effects of Socinianism. While persuaded in our hearts and consciences of the reality of “the faith once delivered to the saints,” our business and our duty, as members of the Church “built upon the apostles and the prophets,” and having a glorious “chief corner-stone,” should be to furnish the present and the rising generation with armour wherewith to stand against the shocks of error, and the insidious devices of heresy.

The Socinian heresy has been grappled with in the most successful manner by writers of various degrees of eminence, both in and out of the communion of the Church of England ; but I do not imagine that their labours have been instrumental to the bringing out of many to a plain and honest confession and rejection of error, and to a reception of the true faith : nor do I suppose that the highly-gifted author of the following Letters looked so much to the reclaiming of Socinians, as to the

becoming caution, we cannot but be struck with the present state of the world, as preparing for such a result as Faber alludes to as immediately preceding the year 1864. May God in his great mercy grant, that our highly privileged country be not found with the mark of the beast on her, at the coming of the Lord Jesus !



establishing in the truth the minds of those who, from the present state of society, and the rapid circulation of opinions, may be exposed to the dangers of unsound doctrine.

As this little volume may fall into the hands of many who have been accustomed to hear Socinianism spoken of by the mild designation of an allowable difference of opinion in the religious world, I trust I shall not be exceeding the bounds of an editor's duty, if, by way of introduction to the great topic so mildly, learnedly, and piously discussed in the following pages, I invite the inquiring reader to see, that it is not merely a difference of opinion as to the bearing of admitted and received truths, but such a total opposition of opinion as must exist between those who take positive truth and positive error for their respective grounds, and as the premises of their argumentations. To treat this subject as it deserves, were to go far, very far beyond the slender limits which are assigned to me. I shall, therefore, confine myself to a few leading particulars, sufficient to bring the reader into a view of the dangerous tendency of the heresy in question, and lead him to the subject of the following Letters, impressed with a sense of its vast importance in general, and of its overwhelming importance to the peace and safety of his own soul.

I. *The true Church of Christ has ever received the inspired Word of God as its sole rule of faith.*

To screen itself from the charge of pure and absolute infidelity, the Socinian heresy also pro-

fesses to take its stand upon the *authority* of the Holy Scriptures; and until its real principles are made apparent, it seems to occupy the same ground in that respect that the Church of Christ does. But as the figments of Socinianism and the doctrines held by the Church of Christ are as wide asunder as the poles, it must be evident that the same ground cannot be common to both; but that they are viewing the same object at points of sight so different and so irreconcilable, as to account at once for their difference of perception. The Socinian professes to take his stand upon the *authority* of the Scriptures;—so does the Church of Christ. But she goes one step further. She takes her stand upon the *divine inspiration* of those records, and upon that principle, and for that reason alone, admits their authority, and subscribes to their authenticity. The Socinian denies the divine inspiration, which ought to be his only ground for admitting the authority and authenticity of the Scriptures, and thus yields to an authority which, upon his own principles, he might consistently deny, and submits to an authenticity which, on the same principles, he might reasonably question. But he knows, that were he thus fully to deny, or thus to question, he must forego all the claim he now makes to stand on Scripture ground, and lay himself open to the broad charge of infidelity.—We shall find that the Socinian denial of inspiration is of a very peculiar complexion. That I may not be guilty of misrepresentation, I shall quote the published opinion, on this subject, of the celebrated English Socinian

leader, *Dr. Priestley*, who, if Socinianism has not again changed its hue, will be admitted as of good authority in matters of Socinian opinion. In his "Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France," p. 18, he thus writes: "That the books of Scripture were written by particular inspiration, is a thing to which the writers themselves make no pretensions. It is a notion destitute of all proof, and that has done great injury to the evidence of Christianity." Upon this statement I make one passing remark, before I add any thing further from *Dr. Priestley*. If the fact of *particular* inspiration (using the term in contradistinction to *general* inspiration) be destitute of proof, as is asserted, then the proof of general inspiration fails with it, for in this case general inspiration is but the aggregate of particular. The Scriptures being thus stripped of their claim to particular inspiration, and their general inspiration sharing, by consequence, the same fate, it becomes an absurdity in the Socinian to take them as an authentic and authoritative rule of faith, in regard to the deep things "that pertain unto God." If they are not of divine, particular, and general inspiration, what are they? Why receive—why listen to them for a moment? But hear *Dr. Priestley*:\* "If you wish to know what, in my opinion, a Christian is bound to believe with respect to the Scriptures, I answer, that the books which are universally received as authentic, are to be considered as faith-

\* Letters to a Phil. Unb. part ii. pref. p. xiii.; also Lett. V.

ful records of past transactions, and especially the account of the intercourse which the Divine Being has kept up with mankind, from the beginning of the world, to the time of our Saviour and his Apostles. No Christian is answerable for more than this. The writers of the books of Scripture were *men*, and therefore *fallible*; but all that we have to do with them is in the character of *historians* and *witnesses* of what they heard and saw. Of course their credibility is to be estimated like that of other historians, viz. from the circumstances in which they wrote, as with respect to their opportunities of knowing the truth of what they relate, and the biases to which they might be subject. Like all other historians, they were liable to mistakes with respect to *things of small moment*, because they might not give sufficient attention to them; and with respect to their *reasoning*, we are fully at liberty to judge of it *as well as that of any other men*, by a due consideration of the propositions they advance and the arguments they allege."

For a masterly exposure of the fallacies of the above statement, I refer the reader to ANDREW FULLER'S "*Comparison of the Calvinistic and Socinian Systems, as to their moral tendency*;" and only add a few remarks. If the sacred writers had been "*historians*" and "*witnesses*" of only what they heard and saw, they would, "like all other historians and witnesses," have been amply qualified to relate what they had received on the testimony of their ears and eyes, without the aid of *particular inspiration*. But the truth is, they relate not only

what (in strictness of speech) they *heard* and *saw*, but a great deal more than that: they relate the secret things of God—things which would have remained for ever secret had they not been matters of pure revelation, and transmitted by a particular inspiration equal to the dignity of the subjects of revelation. If the sacred writers could be classed, in all particulars, with historians in general, as Dr. Priestley would class them, then indeed their credibility would be “estimated like that of other historians;” and it might then be admitted that they were “liable to mistakes with respect to things of small moment, because they might not give sufficient attention to them.” But they cannot be classed with other historians. The position in which they stood was altogether different. Altogether different, too, were the subjects on which their pens were employed. They were subjects such as admitted not of “things of small moment,” for all were alike important in their connection and dependence: and surely the responsible position of the writers, in regard to the truths they were to deliver, was ample in itself to prevent their withholding a sufficient attention from them. But we see that Dr. Priestley does not regard the sacred writers as mere historians, relating only what they heard and saw; but he speaks of their reasoning upon facts and principles. True it may be that we are at liberty to judge of their reasoning as well as that of any other men: but when does that liberty begin? Only when we are endued with a capacity for *comprehending*, in the largest sense of the term,



“the propositions they advance, and the arguments they allege.” The things upon which they reason are “the things of the Spirit of God,” which are only “spiritually” and not naturally “discerned.” When, therefore, we can stand side by side with the sacred writers, and with an equality of spiritual discernment of things spiritual, we shall be as much at liberty to judge as they were to reason ; and not before. However obscurely the Socinian may regard the Scriptures in reference to their divine inspiration, and notwithstanding the inconsistencies into which he runs, by reason of the doubts he entertains, yet he would charge us with calumny were we to deny his respect, in some sort, for the Scriptures, as containing a revelation from God upon subjects of infinite importance : but yet, how can he entertain a genuine respect, when he assumes that the revelation was made to us through the instrumentality of men, whom, in matters of such vast moment, God permitted to be “*fallible*” as historians, and probably inconclusive as reasoners ? for Dr. Priestley’s language implies in them inconclusiveness, or, at the very least, a liability to it. What real respect (upon Socinian principles, as exhibited by Dr. Priestley,) can be due either to the Author of the revelation, the revelation itself, or the instruments through which it was made ? I profess myself incapable of judging. If the revelation is made to bear the usual marks of human inefficiency, or admitted to be liable to it, then the “assurance of faith” is a term without a meaning ; and we might as well, if not better, be without such a revelation,

and live and die upon the principles of natural religion. The real estimation in which Socinians hold the Scriptures may be readily gathered from their published version of the New Testament, in which every device is used to corrupt, obscure, and distort those fundamental truths of the eternal Word, which, when a long-suffering God shall permit, will give the death-blow to the obnoxious system. For a masterly examination of the Socinian Version, I must refer the reader to the last edition of Archbishop Magee's valuable work on the atonement.

II. *While the true Church of Christ receives the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith, it cordially embraces, with an equality of faith, every thing that is therein stated.*

While receiving the Scriptures as of general authority, though not as matters of particular inspiration, the Socinian, upon the grounds which have already appeared, refuses the exercise of simple faith, when called upon to receive and hold certain departments of truth contained in them. Perhaps he would say, he would not admit the Scriptures as being of a divine authority at all, did not the weight of internal as well as external evidence, by its demonstrative force, compel him: and therefore he will not admit such parts of their particular statements as admit not of an equal demonstration. But what, in reality, does this amount to? Why this:—that revelation in general is not to be received on simple faith alone; and if revelation

in general is not to be so received, then of course that no mysterious and indemonstrable part of the general revelation can possibly lay claim to admission on faith alone. Thus, then, the simple and implicit faith, which, from one end of the Bible to the other, is clearly exhibited as the prime feature of the christian character, and the forerunner of all the rest, is by the Socinian treated as a non-essential, or rather as becoming essential only so far as demonstration may prepare the way. But, in truth, demonstration is not the atmosphere in which faith can live. When absolute demonstration is complete, faith dies. A belief in any fact, dragged forth by demonstration, is not that exalted gift which the Scriptures call faith, firm as it may be, any more than the borrowed light of the moon can be called the essential and proper light of the sun. Herein, then, lies another dangerous view of the Socinian heresy. It practically rejects such parts of divine truth as demonstration does not provide for the reception of: that is, it receives what falls within the limits of a creature's capacity to comprehend; and rejects that which partakes of the acknowledged incomprehensibility of its divine Author. But the danger to which I now refer will be more apparent, when we consider what revealed truths the Socinian rejects. In the list of his rejections we find included those leading and fundamental doctrines and principles which distinguish the religion of the New Testament from every thing else that has been called religion since the world began. The effect of his rejections is to

make Christianity nothing more than a re-enactment or more formal promulgation of the legislations of natural religion; and the sacrificial and vicarious sufferings of Christ but a testimony of its truth sealed with tears and blood; and human merit the ground of acceptance, and perfect obedience the viaticum to salvation. In a word, the rejections of the Socinian make out the Gospel dispensation to be only a republication of what was irrevocable, the death of Christ an unmeaning tragedy, and fallen man the author of his own salvation. In effect, it leaves man pretty nearly in the state in which it found him. The false principles which the rejections of the Socinian scheme involve, may be gathered from the following concise statement of one of the ablest champions of the true faith: \* “That,” according to the Socinian creed, “Christ was a person sent into the world to promulgate the will of God; to communicate new lights on the subject of religious duties; by his life to set an example of perfect obedience; by his death to manifest his sincerity; and by his resurrection to convince us of the great truth which he had been commissioned to teach—our rising to a future life. This, they say, is the sum and substance of Christianity. It furnishes a purer morality, and a more operative enforcement: its morality more pure, as built upon juster notions of the divine nature; and its enforcements more operative, as founded on the certainty of a state of retribution.” If such, indeed,

\* Archbp. Magee on the Atonement, vol. i. p. 12, 5th edition.



were the sum and substance of Christianity, how much of the New Testament we might afford to cancel. Page after page might be committed to the flames; and the old doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, to which, from the very beginning, the Church has clung with the fervency of a holy faith, might be cast off as the mere subject of a thesis for the schools, and the eternal Godhead of Christ might become as worthless as a popish legend.

III. *While the Church of Christ receives the Holy Scriptures as the sole rule of faith, and holds with a simple faith all that they reveal, she looks to the great doctrine of the atonement by the vicarious suffering and death of Christ, as the only ground of reconciliation between God and man; and in the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity she traces the economy of the work of human redemption.*

The Socinian denies the fact of man's utter depravity, and so dispenses with all necessity for an atonement. If the doctrine of man's total depravity were not inseparably connected with every other doctrine of the New Testament scheme, and if man were (as the Socinian leaders would have us believe) a being of a mixed character, partaking both of the positively good and positively evil, and with a preponderance of the positively good, and endued therefore with an innate and independent capacity for virtuous action, then indeed the danger arising from Socinian rejections would be very sensibly diminished. Perhaps there never would

have been any thing for Socinians to reject—certainly nothing of that kind which they now profess to reject—so that “a scale of purer morality, and a more operative enforcement to it,” and not the doctrine of an atonement, which the depravity of man rendered necessary, might have been the desiderata which a revelation was intended to supply. Upon the denial of man’s depravity hangs the denial of the doctrine of the atonement; so that if both these could be successfully denied, then, by consequence, the divinity and eternal Sonship of the Messiah would be only a matter of curious speculation; and Christ, viewed as “*a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses or any other prophet,*” (as Dr. Priestley impiously declares him to have been,\*) would have been all-sufficient for the accomplishment of the purposes of God as exhibited to us by the Socinian view of divine revelation. But, however Socinian teachers may have laboured to soften down the character of sin, by designating it as “human frailty,” and by representing it as something calling rather for compassion from God than righteous abhorrence: though they may deny sin to be in any sense an infinite evil, or (which is nearly the same thing,) deserving of endless punishment, or that such punishment will follow it; yet the refinements which they draw, and the angry tone which they assume when the “dignity” of man is assailed by his being

\* Letter to a Phil. Unb. Part ii. p. 33—35.

branded as a rebel and an apostate, and altogether vile in his natural state, afford abundant evidence of that leaven of pride in themselves which is the essence of sin, and the fatal first-cause of universal depravity; and leaves much room for us to conclude that they strongly suspect the unpalatable truth, which they would gladly conceal and stifle, were it not as visible as the sun in the heavens. And why would they conceal and stifle it? For no other reason, but that the doctrine of the atonement (the truth of which settles the question of the divinity of Christ and the Trinity in Unity,) is bound up with it; and because they know that the absence of the one would render the other unnecessary. But while the doctrine of man's total depravity is written as with a pen of iron, and confirmed by the daily experience of every man who dares to look into his own heart, the tenets of the Socinian must be unspeakably dangerous, as tending to lessen, nay, to set at nought, the inestimable value of a Saviour, whose efficacy depends on the sufficiency of his atonement, and whose sufficient atonement could have been wrought only through the development of the great "mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

IV. *The true faith, gathered by the Church of Christ from the Scriptures, as the sole rule of faith, is, that salvation is altogether of grace, and not in any degree through works.\**

\* Ephes. ii. 8, 9. Rom. iv. 4, 5.

The very notion of an atonement such as that revealed in the Scriptures implies this very truth, which is so abundantly stated. As the Socinian rejects the doctrine of the atonement, he necessarily denies that free grace has any thing to do with salvation. But the Socinian is not content with a denial of the doctrines of free grace thus deducible from his denial of the atonement, if the language of Dr. Harwood may be taken as expressing the sentiments of the whole sect. In his volume of Sermons, p. 193, he says, that “all hopes founded upon any thing else than *a good moral life* are merely imaginary, and contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel.” This statement is perfectly consistent with the broad principles of Socinianism, as we have already seen; but totally subversive of that hope which maketh not ashamed. What does the Socinian suppose a “*good*” moral life to consist in? In perfect obedience from the cradle to the grave? In spotless obedience to that law which the Psalmist found to be so “exceeding broad” as to preclude perfection? Or rather in a preponderance of good over evil; or, in other words, a motley mixture of good and evil—the turning of the scale? Verily, the Jews, in their blindness, held the same obscure notions of good and evil, when they sought salvation by the law, and not by grace.\*

\* In the *Yad Hachazakah* of MAIMONIDES we have the Jewish mind clearly laid open to us. In support of what I have advanced above, I quote the following: “Every one of the sons of men has his good deeds and also his wicked deeds. He whose good deeds amount to more than his wicked deeds, is a *righteous man*; and he whose wicked deeds amount to more than his good



V. *The true faith, as gathered by the Church of Christ from the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith, necessarily developes itself by holiness of life; and particularly leads to meekness, humility, charity, love to the Saviour, deep veneration of the Scriptures, and heavenly-mindedness.*

I will not make so severe a charge against Socinianism, as to say that it necessarily tends to prevent

deeds, is a *wicked man*." Again: "In this balancing, not the *number* of the good or wicked deeds, but the *importance* of the same, is taken into consideration; so that there may be one good deed which makes up for many wicked ones." Again: "Every man ought to look upon himself during the whole year, even as though he were half innocent and half guilty. . . . Now if he commit but one sin more, behold, he causes the scale of guilt to preponderate. . . . if he fulfil but one single commandment more, behold, he causes the scale of innocence to preponderate, and brings salvation and deliverance on himself." The same supposed preponderance of good and evil in an individual was said also to influence the salvation or destruction of the aggregate of society, tried in the same balance. In the *Bab. Talmud. Treatise Rosh Hashanah*, § 1, we find the following remarkable passage, the statement in which goes upon the same principle as that exhibited by Maimonides. "Rabbi Krespedua said in the name of Rabbi Iochanan: Three books are opened on the New-year's day: one of the perfectly righteous; one of the perfectly wicked; one of the intermediate. The perfectly righteous are inscribed and sealed for life forthwith; the perfectly wicked are inscribed and sealed for death forthwith; and the intermediate remain in suspension from the New-year's day until the day of atonement: if (then) they be pure, they are inscribed for life; but if they be not pure, they are inscribed for death." See "*The main Principles of the Creed and Ethics of the Jews, exhibited in Selections from the Yad Hachazakah of Maimonides*, translated by H. H. BERNARD, Cambridge."

While the Socinian denies human depravity, and the necessity of an atonement, and relies for salvation on a "*good moral life*," let him look to those who "crucified the Lord of life," and see how fearfully he takes his stand beside them: but with this difference,—that while they denied Christ to be the expected Messiah, they admitted the idea of plurality in the Godhead; but the Socinian rejects—rejects—rejects; and puts forth on the ocean of eternity, with human reason for his compass, human weakness for his rudder, human speculation for his sail, and human corruption for the anchor of his hope beyond the grave!

all these things ; but certainly I cannot compliment it by saying that it promotes the growth of them. It may advocate a scale of morals, and of a high character too : but the highest morals do not amount to *holiness of life*. Holiness of life proceeds from a spiritual principle within, the result of regeneration and renewal, and not of human will and an innate love of virtue. Meekness, humility, and charity (ἡ ἀγάπη) are Christian graces ; they spring not out of man's natural heart : and surely there is nothing in the Socinian scheme that can plant them there. As to the two former, they are inconsistent with that pride of reason, pride of judgment, and pride of will, which are the leading features of the heresy of which we are speaking. Does Socinianism promote love to the Saviour ? Why should the Socinian love him ? What benefit does he acknowledge to have received ? What principle of love does his system enjoin ? Christ must be first received as a Saviour, before he can be loved as a Saviour. And as to a veneration of the Scriptures, how shall he look for it in the hearts of those who would mutilate them to meet the notions of their own fancy, and reject what their pride of reason forbids them to receive ? And as to heavenly-mindedness, can it be expected in a heart that refuses to demean itself so much as to become the "temple of the Holy Ghost?"—I touch upon these points briefly, and with a gentle hand ; and I should not even refer to them, were I not desirous that the inquiring reader should draw the plain inference, that Socinianism as a system of religion is,

in point of doctrine, deficient in all essential particulars, and leaves its professors in danger of being destitute of those fruits which alone can prove the goodness of the tree.

In the following Letters, the great point of Socinian controversy, viz. the divinity of the Son of God, is exclusively handled; and so handled, that were I to touch it with a hope of improvement, I should but be gilding the diamond, or painting the lilly. With the proof of this great point, the truth of all the rest of the vast mediatorial scheme follows; and then it appears plain how God could remain inflexibly just, and yet be the justifier of all who come to him through Christ: how mercy and truth have met together, how righteousness and peace have kissed each other, in the Gospel of a once humbled and now exalted Saviour.

In regard to the work itself, to which these few remarks are but slightly introductory, it is difficult to speak in terms of adequate praise. There is an ingenuous meekness of spirit about it, which betokens the sincerity of a genuine faith; while the critical acumen, which it everywhere displays, evinces the patience of a devoutly inquiring mind. The argumentation of the work will be found lucid in the extreme, and such as to bring the great subject in its bearings within the reach of every dispassionate mind; and I know not of any one page that is stained either by illiberality of sentiment or exegetical trickery. There is in every part of the work a visible honesty that must command the respect of opponents; an uncom-

promising firmness which wins the confidence of adherents ; a piety which cheers the heart of the experimental christian ; a simplicity of exegesis which delights the scholar ; and a current of proof that it will be hard for Socinianism, with all its modern refinements, to make head against. I know of no work of its class and kind that I have risen from the perusal of, with such unfeigned delight ; and while I offer thanksgiving, where alone it is due, that our theological literature is enriched by this valuable little work, I humbly pray that the perusal of it may minister to the edification of many an inquiring mind upon a subject, the full importance of which will never be known on this side of the grave.

We are living at a time of no ordinary interest. It is a season in which it behoves every man to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in him. Scenes of trial are preparing for the Church of Christ. On the broad ground of christian consistency, the time is come for the Church of Christ to arouse herself ; and on the ground of personal safety—the safety of the immortal soul—it is now more needful than ever, that every man should examine himself whether he be in the faith ; and if not, then that he should flee at once to the offered Saviour, as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge, and rest not till he knows that, “being justified by faith,” he has “peace with God.”

DARLSTON RECTORY,

*April, 1836.*



LETTERS

ON THE

DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

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LETTER I.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I have recently perused a sermon delivered by you at the ordination of the Reverend J. Sparks, in Baltimore, with no small degree of interest. The subjects of which it treats must be regarded as highly important, by every intelligent man who is a serious inquirer after revealed truth. And if the views which you have disclosed will stand the test of examination, and shall appear to be those which the word of God maintains, or which it will justify, it certainly will be the duty of every friend to Christianity to embrace and promote them.

It is proper, no doubt, that every one who reads and reflects upon your sermon, should do it without prejudice or party views. Unless I am deceived as

to the state of my own feelings, I have endeavoured impartially to weigh the arguments, and examine the reasonings which it presents, with a wish to know and believe the truth. I dare not flatter myself, indeed, that I have perfectly succeeded in doing this ; for every man who is acquainted with his own heart, will find reason to believe that he often has been, and may be again, deceived by it. But, as I am not conscious of party feelings on the present occasion, will you permit me, without apology, to lay before you my thoughts in regard to three topics of your discourse that stand in close connexion with each other, and are among the principal points in regard to which I feel myself compelled to dissent from your opinions?

The points to which I refer are—*the principles of interpreting Scripture; the unity of God; and the divinity and humanity of the Saviour.* I limit myself to these three, because it would require more time and labour than I can possibly spare at present, and more health than I enjoy, to express in writing my views of all the statements of doctrines which you have made. I might adduce another reason for confining myself within these limits. If the principles of reasoning which you adopt, and the results which you deduce from them, in regard to some of the points on which I am about to remark, are untenable or incorrect, the consequence of this must extend itself *essentially* to some of the remaining and most important topics which you have discussed in your sermon.

The general principles of interpreting Scripture you describe in the following manner.

“We regard the Scriptures as the records of God’s successive revelations to mankind, and particularly of the last and most perfect revelation of his will by Jesus Christ. Whatever doctrines seem to us to be clearly taught in the Scriptures, we receive without reserve or exception. We do not, however, attach equal importance to all the books in this collection. Our religion, we believe, lies chiefly in the New Testament. The dispensation of Moses, compared with that of Jesus, we consider as imperfect, earthly, obscure, adapted to the childhood of the human race, a preparation for a nobler system, and chiefly useful now as serving to confirm and illustrate the Christian Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the only master of Christians; and whatever he taught, either during his personal ministry, or by his inspired Apostles, we regard as of divine authority, and profess to make the rule of our lives.

“This authority which we give to the Scriptures, is a reason, we conceive, for studying them with peculiar care, and for inquiring anxiously into the principles of interpretation, by which their true meaning may be ascertained. The principles adopted by the class of Christians in whose name I speak, need to be explained, because they are often misunderstood. We are particularly accused of making an unwarrantable use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture. We are said to exalt reason above revelation, to prefer our own wisdom to God’s. Loose and undefined charges of this kind are circulated so freely, and with such injurious intentions, that we think it due to ourselves, and to the cause of truth, to express our views with some particularity.

“Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this—that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. We believe that God, when he condescends to speak and write, submits, if we may so say, to the established rules of speaking and writing. How else would the Scriptures avail us, more than if communicated in an unknown tongue?

“Now, all books and all conversation require in the reader or hearer the constant exercise of reason; or their true import is only to be obtained by continual comparison and inference. Human language, you well know, admits

various interpretations; and every word and every sentence must be modified and explained—according to the subject which is discussed—according to the purposes, feelings, circumstances, and principles of the writer, and according to the genius and idioms of the language which he uses. These are acknowledged principles in the interpretation of human writings; and a man whose words we should explain without reference to these principles, would reproach us justly with a criminal want of candour, and an intention of obscuring or distorting his meaning.

“Were the Bible written in a language and style of its own, did it consist of words which admit but a single sense, and of sentences wholly detached from each other, there would be no place for the principles now laid down. We could not reason about it as about other writings. But such a book would be of little worth; and, perhaps, of all books, the Scriptures correspond least to this description.

“The word of God bears the stamp of the same hand which we see in his works. It has infinite connexions and dependencies. Every proposition is linked with others, and is to be compared with others, that its full and precise import may be understood. Nothing stands alone. The New Testament is built on the Old. The christian dispensation is a continuation of the Jewish, the completion of a vast scheme of providence, requiring great extent of view in the reader. Still more, the Bible treats of subjects on which we receive ideas from other sources besides itself; such subjects as the nature, passions, relations, and duties of man; and it expects us to restrain and modify its language by the known truths which observation and experience furnish on these topics.

“We profess not to know a book which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible. In addition to the remarks now made on its infinite connexions, we may observe that its style nowhere affects the precision of science or the accuracy of definition. Its language is singularly glowing, bold, and figurative, demanding more frequent departures from the literal sense than that of our own age and country, and consequently demands more continual exercise of judgment. We find, too, that the different portions of this book, instead of being confined to general truths, refer perpetually to the times when they were written, to states of society, to modes of thinking, to controversies in the Church, to feelings and usages which have passed away, and without the knowledge of which we are constantly in danger of extending to all times and places what was of



temporary and local application. We find, too, that some of these books are strongly marked by the genius and character of their respective writers, that the Holy Spirit did not so guide the Apostles as to suspend the peculiarities of their minds, and that a knowledge of their feelings, and of the influences under which they were placed, is one of the preparations for understanding their writings. With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually, to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek, in the nature of the subject and the aim of the writer, his true meaning; and, in general, to make use of what is known, for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths.

“Need I descend to particulars to prove that the Scriptures demand the exercise of reason? Take, for example, the style in which they generally speak of God, and observe how habitually they apply to him human passions and organs. Recollect the declarations of Christ, that he came not to send peace, but a sword; that unless we eat his flesh, and drink his blood, we have no life in us; that we must hate father and mother; pluck out the right eye; and a vast number of passages equally bold and unlimited. Recollect the unqualified manner in which it is said of Christians that they possess all things, know all things, and can do all things. Recollect the verbal contradiction between Paul and James, and the apparent clashing of some parts of Paul’s writings, with the general doctrines and end of Christianity. I might extend the enumeration indefinitely, and who does not see that we must limit all these passages by the known attributes of God, of Jesus Christ, and of human nature, and by the circumstances under which they were written, so as to give the language a quite different import from what it would require, had it been applied to different beings, or used in different connexions?

“Enough has been said to show in what sense we make use of reason in interpreting Scripture. From a variety of possible interpretations, we select that which accords with the nature of the subject, and the state of the writer, with the connexion of the passage, with the general strain of Scripture, with the known character and will of God, and with the obvious and acknowledged laws of nature. In other words, we believe that God never contradicts, in one part of Scripture, what he teaches in another, and never contradicts, in revelation, what he teaches in his works and providence; and we therefore distrust every interpretation which, after deliberate attention, seems repugnant to any

established truth. We reason about the Bible precisely as civilians do about the constitution under which we live; who, you know, are accustomed to limit one provision of that venerable instrument by others, and to fix the precise import of its parts by inquiring into its general spirit, into the intentions of its authors, and into the prevalent feelings, impressions, and circumstances of the time when it was framed. Without these principles of interpretation, we frankly acknowledge that we cannot defend the divine authority of the Scriptures. Deny us this latitude, and we must abandon this book to its enemies." pp. 3—6.

To a great part of these principles I give my cheerful and most cordial assent. They are the principles which I apply to the explanation of the Scriptures from day to day, in my private studies and in my public labours. They are the principles by which I am led to embrace the opinions that I have espoused, and by which, so far as I am able, I expect to defend these opinions, whenever called in duty to do it.

While I thus give my cordial approbation to most of the above extract from your sermon, will you indulge me in expressing a wish that the rank and value of the Old Testament, in the Christian's library, had been described in somewhat different terms? I do most fully accord with the idea that the Gospel, or the New Testament, is more perfect than the Mosaic Law, or than the Old Testament. On what other ground can the assertions of Paul, in 2 Corinthians iii., in Hebrews viii., and in other places, be believed or justified? The gospel gives a clearer view than the Jewish Scriptures of our duty and of our destiny—of the objects of our hopes and fears—of the character of God, and the

way of salvation. I agree fully, that whatever in the Old Testament respects the Jews, simply as Jews—*e. g.* their ritual, their food, their dress, their civil polity, their government—in a word, whatever from its nature was *national* and *local*,—is not binding upon us under the Christian dispensation.

I am well satisfied, too, that the character of God and the duty of men were, in many respects, less clearly revealed under the ancient dispensation than they now are. “The law was given by Moses;” but “no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten, who dwelleth in the bosom of the Father, *he hath revealed him*,”—*i. e.* it was reserved for Christ to make a *full* display of the divine character; no man, no prophet who preceded him, ever had such knowledge of God as enabled him to do it. I am aware that many Christians do not seem to understand this passage; and, with well-meaning but mistaken views, undertake to deduce the character and designs of God as fully and as clearly from the Old Testament as from the New.

I must believe, too, that the *duties* of Christians are, in most respects, more fully and definitely taught in the gospel than in the Old Testament; and I cannot approve of that method of reasoning which deduces our duties principally from texts in the Old Testament that sometimes are less clear, when the New Testament presents the same subjects in such characters of light that he who runneth may read.

But when you say, "Jesus Christ is the only master of Christians; and whatever he taught, either during his personal ministry or by his inspired Apostles, we regard as of divine authority, and profess to make the rule of our lives," does not this naturally imply that we are absolved from obligation to receive the Old Testament in any sense as our guide; and that what it teaches, we are not bound "to make the rule of our lives?" I do not feel certain that it was your design to affirm this; but the words in their connexion seem naturally to bear this import. To such a view I should object, that those parts of the Old Testament which express the will of God, in reference to the great points of duty that must, from the nature of moral beings, be for ever the same under every dispensation, may be and ought to be regarded as unrepealed. It is a very sound maxim, in the interpretation of divine as well as human laws,—*manente ratione, manet ipsa lex*—*a law is unrepealed, while the reason of that law continues.* Express repeal only can exempt a law from the application of this maxim. And when our Saviour says, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in nowise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," he seems to me plainly to have declared the immutability of the ancient *moral* law, in the sense already explained.

What shall we say, moreover, of the devotional parts of the Old Testament, (the Book of Psalms, for instance,) or of those numerous prophetic parts which are sermons on the duties and obligations of

men, or predictions of a future Messiah, and of the nature and prosperity of his Church? Are these any more Jewish (except as to the garb in which they are clothed) than Christian? I admit that they are all less perfect than that which the New Testament furnishes on the same topics; but I believe them to be sanctioned by the same authority, and to require a similar respect and deference.

In regard to what you say respecting the leading principle of interpreting Scripture, I cannot hesitate to declare, that nothing is clearer to my apprehension, than that God, when he speaks to men, speaks in such language as is used by those whom he addresses. Of course, the language of the Bible is to be interpreted by the same laws, so far as philology is concerned, as that of any other book. I ask with you, How else is the Bible a *revelation*? How else can men ever come to agree in what manner the Scripture should be interpreted, or feel any assurance that they understand the meaning of its language?

I find little from which I should dissent, in the remainder of your observations upon the general *principles* of interpretation. I might perhaps make some objections to the manner in which the office of reason, in the interpretation of Scripture, is occasionally described. But I am confident that I admit, as fully as you do or can do, the *proper office* of reason in the whole matter of religion, both in regard to doctrine and practice.

It is to our reason that the arguments which prove the divine origin of Christianity are addressed;



and it is by reason that we prove, or are led to admit this origin, on general or historical grounds. Reason prescribes, or at any rate developes and sanctions, the laws of interpreting Scripture. The cases mentioned by you, in which reason must be exercised, are in general striking exemplifications of this. But when reason is satisfied that the Bible is the Book of God, by proof which she cannot reject, and yet preserve her character; and when she has decided what laws of exegesis\* the nature of human language requires; the office that remains for her in regard to the Scripture, is the application of those laws to the actual interpretation of the Bible. When by their application she becomes satisfied with respect to what the sacred writers really meant to declare in any case, she admits it without hesitation, whether it be a doctrine, the relation of a fact, or a precept. It is the highest office of reason to believe doctrines and facts which God has asserted to be true, and to submit to his precepts, although many things, in regard to the manner in which those facts and doctrines can be explained, or those precepts vindicated, may be beyond her reach. In short, the Scriptures being once admitted to be the word of God, or of divine authority, the sole office of reason in respect to them is to act as an *interpreter* of revelation, and not in any case as a *legislator*. Reason can only judge of the laws of exegesis, and direct the application of them, in order to discover simply what

\* A term of frequent occurrence with expositors and Biblical critics. It signifies *examination* or *interpretation*.

the sacred writers meant to assert. This being discovered, it is either to be received as they have asserted it, or their divine authority must be rejected, and our obligation to believe all which they assert, denied. There is no other alternative. Philosophy has no right to interfere here. If she ever interferes, it must be when the question is pending, whether the Bible is divine. Nor has system, prejudice, sectarian feeling, orthodoxy, or heterodoxy, so called, any right to interfere. The claims of the Bible to be authoritative being once admitted, the simple question in respect to it is, What does it teach? In regard to any particular passage, What idea did the original writer mean to convey? When this is ascertained by the legitimate rules of interpretation, it is authoritative,—this is *orthodoxy* in the highest and best sense of the word; and every thing which is opposed to it, which modifies it, which fritters its meaning away, is *heterodoxy*, is *heresy*, to whatever name or party it is attached.

I presume you will agree without hesitation to these remarks. The grand Protestant maxim, that *the Bible is our only and sufficient rule of faith and practice*, implies most clearly the very same principles which I have stated; and these every man must admit, that acknowledges the paramount claims of the Bible to be believed, and has any tolerable acquaintance with the subject of its interpretation.

If there be any thing to which I should object in your statement, generally considered, of the laws of

interpretation, it is rather the colouring which has been given to some of the language in which it is expressed. You commence by saying, that your party are charged with “exalting reason above revelation—with preferring their own wisdom to God’s;” and that these charges are “circulated freely, and with injurious intentions.” You will readily acknowledge, as a general fact, that there is difficulty in giving an impartial statement of opinions, which we thus strongly feel to have been misrepresented. We certainly are under temptation, in such cases, to set off our own opinions to the best advantage, and to place those of our opponents in the most repulsive attitude. And although Trinitarians, in fact, differ less from you, in respect to the laws of interpretation, than you seem to have apprehended, the belief, on your part, that a wider difference existed, seems to have given a peculiar cast to some sentences which simple discussion would hardly admit.

With the two last paragraphs of your sermon that are quoted above, I wish not to be understood as signifying that I entirely agree. It is, however, rather from the *application* of some exegetical principles which is made in them, than from the principles themselves, that I dissent. I shall have occasion to remark hereafter on this subject. I have mentioned it now, merely to prevent any mistake with regard to the meaning of what I say here upon the laws of interpretation, as exhibited by you.

It would have given me pleasure to find you un-

conditionally admitting that the general principles of interpretation which you defend are not original, nor peculiar to your party. But you seem to qualify this, by saying that "*all Christians OCCASIONALLY adopt them.*" If I understand you rightly, then, you would concede, that only Unitarians admit substantially the *system of exegesis* which you have described, and practice upon it. In this, however, (if this be your meaning,) you are mistaken,—at least it appears plainly so to me in respect to the divines of New England, who at the present time are called *orthodox*.\* I doubt whether any man can study the science of interpretation, for a considerable time together, without adopting those *principles* of it, *for substance*, which you seem to claim appropriately for Unitarians.

How can it be explained, then, supposing you and I are both sincerely seeking after truth, and both adopt, for substance, the same maxims of interpretation, that we should differ so widely in the results that flow from the application of these principles? Perhaps some light may be cast upon this question in the sequel of these letters.

\* This remark may be extended so as to include all those writers in this country who are usually denominated orthodox or evangelical.

## LETTER II.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

It would be very gratifying to find in your sermon, as much respecting the doctrine of the Trinity with which I might accord, as in your principles of interpretation. My apprehensions respecting this doctrine, however, differ from yours. It is not without examination and reflection that I have embraced my present views of it; and the perusal of your statement of the doctrine in question, and your arguments against it, have not persuaded me that my views are erroneous.

You will not expect me, however, in these Letters, which are intended to be brief, to go into a discussion of this great subject, which shall embrace all the important topics which it presents. I intend to touch on those points only on which the hinge of the controversy seems to me to turn; and on these in a manner as summary as the nature and difficulty of the case will permit.



The statement which you make of your own faith in regard to the unity of God, and your account of the doctrine of the Trinity, are as follow.

“ *First.* We believe in the doctrine of God’s UNITY, or that there is one God, and one only. To this truth we give infinite importance, and we feel ourselves bound to take heed, lest any man spoil us of it by vain philosophy. The proposition, *that there is one God*, seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it, that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hair-breadth distinctions between *being* and *person*, which the sagacity of latter ages has discovered. We find no intimation that this language was to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God’s unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings.

“ We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that it subverts the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other’s society. ✓ They perform different parts in man’s redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is Mediator, and not the Father. The Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here then we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed. It is difference of properties, and acts, and consciousness, which leads us to the belief of different intelligent beings; and if this mark fail us, our whole knowledge fails,—we have no proof that all the agents and persons in the universe are not one and the same mind. When we attempt to conceive of three Gods,

we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents, distinguished from each other by similar marks and peculiarities to those which separate the persons of the Trinity; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing with each other, loving each other, and performing different acts, how can they help regarding them as different beings, different minds?" pp. 8, 9.

My object in *this* letter is not to controvert your creed, but to consider your representation of the doctrine of the Trinity, as stated, believed, and defended by those with whom I am accustomed to think and act.

Admitting that you have given a fair account of our belief, I cannot see, indeed, why we are not virtually guilty of Tritheism,\* or at least of something which approximates so near to it, that I acknowledge myself unable to distinguish it from Tritheism. But I cannot help feeling that you have made neither an impartial nor a correct statement of what we believe, and what we are accustomed to teach and defend.

It needs but a moderate acquaintance with the history of the doctrine in question to satisfy any one that a great variety of explanations have been attempted by inquisitive or by adventurous minds. All acknowledge the difficulty of the subject; I regret to say, that some have not refrained from treating it as though it were more within their comprehension than it is.

But, among all the different explanations which I have found, I have not met with any one which denied, or at least was designed to deny, the UNITY

\* The worship of three Gods.

OF GOD. All admit this to be a fundamental principle: all acknowledge that it is designated in characters of light, both in the Jewish and Christian revelations; and that to deny it would be the grossest absurdity, as well as impiety.

It may indeed be questioned whether the explanations given of the doctrine of the Trinity by some who have speculated on this subject are consistent with the divine unity, when the language which they use is interpreted agreeably to the common laws of exegesis. But, that their representations were not *designed* to call in question the *divine unity*, is what I think every candid reader of their works will be disposed to admit.

Now, when I consider this fact, so plain and so easily established, and then look at the method in which you state the doctrine of the Trinity, as exhibited above, I confess it gives me pain to think that you have not conceded or even intimated that Trinitarians do or can admit the unity of God. You have a right to say, if you so think, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as they explain and defend it, is at variance with the *divine unity*, and that these two things are inconsistent with each other. But, to appropriate to those solely who call themselves Unitarians, the belief that there is but one God—or to construct an account of the Trinitarian creed (as it seems to me you have done in the paragraph on which I am remarking,) so as not even to intimate to your hearers or readers that your opponents admit or advocate the *divine unity*, is doing that which you would censure in an

antagonist, and which cannot well serve the interests of truth.

But let us examine your statement of our creed.

“ We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that it subverts the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other’s society. They perform different parts in man’s redemption,—each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is Mediator, and not the Father; the Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here then we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed.” p. 9.

Is not this account a very different one from that which many of your brethren are accustomed to give of us? By them it is said, that there is a great discordance and contradictory statements and explanations of the doctrine of the Trinity among those who embrace it. Do not you amalgamate us altogether, make us harmonious Tritheists, and then give us over to the reproach of Tritheism, or at least of glaring inconsistency?

After all, the statement which you exhibit of our views is very far from that which we (or at least all Trinitarians with whom I am acquainted) make of our belief. I do not deny that *some* writers have given grounds for a statement not very diverse from yours, as it regards the doctrine of the Trinity. Even

some great and good men, in their zeal to defend this doctrine, have sought to reduce the whole subject to human comprehension. How vain the attempt, experience has demonstrated. Efforts of this nature, however well designed or ably conducted, never yet have led to any thing but greater darkness. "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection?"

But though I readily admit that efforts to explain what in the nature of the case is inexplicable, may have misled some in their exertions to acquire religious knowledge, or given occasion to others of stumbling, yet I am not prepared to admit that the great body of Trinitarians have given just occasion to charge them with a denial of the *unity of God*, or with opinions subversive of this. You certainly ought not to deny them the same liberty, in the use of terms, which all men take on difficult subjects, for the accurate description of which language is not framed, perhaps is not in its nature adequate. They must discuss such subjects by using figurative language, by using terms which (if I may be indulged the liberty of speaking thus) *approximate* as nearly to the expression of the ideas that they mean to convey, as any which they can select. If there is any obscurity in these general observations, I hope it will be cleared up in the remarks that are to follow.

Since I refuse assent to your statement of our belief, you will feel a right to inquire what we do believe, that you may compare this with the doctrine of divine unity, and judge for yourself whether it is



subversive of it or not. I cannot refuse my assent to a proposal so reasonable; nor do I feel any inclination to shrink from the task of stating our belief, and then to proffer the excuse, that every thing respecting the subject is too mysterious and recondite to be the object of distinct contemplation. What we do believe can be stated—what we do *not* profess to define or explain can be stated, and the reasons why we do not attempt definition or explanation: and this is what I shall now attempt.

I must not, however, be understood as pledging myself that those, in general, with whom I am accustomed to think and act, will adopt my statement, and maintain that it exhibits the best method of explaining or defending the great doctrine in question. Notwithstanding we are so often charged with adherence to forms and modes of expression contained in creeds, we use as great a variety of language, in giving instruction with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, as with respect to the other doctrines of religion. In regard to the statement which I shall make, I can say only, that it is not the result of concert, in any degree, with my clerical brethren, for the purpose of making a statement to which they will adhere. It is the result of investigation, and reflection on the subject, as it appears to be exhibited in the Scriptures, and in the writings of the leading divines whom I have been able to consult.

I believe, then,

I. That God is ONE; *numerically one, in essence and attributes.* In other words,—the infinitely perfect Spirit,

the Creator and Preserver of all things, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, has *numerically* the same *essence*, and the *same* *perfections*, so far as they are known to us. To particularize: the Son possesses not simply a *similar* or *equal* essence and perfections, but *numerically the same* as the Father, without division, and without multiplication.

II. The Son (and also the Holy Spirit,) does in some respect, *truly* and *really*, not merely nominally or logically, differ from the Father.

I am aware, as I have hinted above, that you may find writers upon the doctrine of the Trinity, who have stated the subject of my first proposition in a manner somewhat different. But, after making due allowance for inattention to precision of language, the difficulty of the subject, and the various ways which men naturally take to illustrate a difficult subject, I am not aware that many of them would dissent substantially from the statement now made. Certain it is, that the Lutheran Confession exhibits the same view.

The words are,—“The divine essence is *ONE*, which is called, and is, God, eternal, incorporeal, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible.” Art. I.

The Confession of Helvetia (written A.D. 1566) declares, that “God is *ONE* in essence or nature, subsisting by himself, all sufficient in himself, invisible, without a body, infinite, eternal, the Creator of all things visible and invisible,” &c. It adds, “We detest the multitude of gods, because it is expressly written, The Lord thy God is one God,” &c.

The Confession of Basil (A.D. 1532) declares, that there is “*ONE* eternal, almighty God in essence and substance, and *not three Gods*.”

The Confession of the Waldenses states, “that the Holy Trinity is, in essence, one only true, *alone* eternal, almighty, and incomprehensible God, of *ONE* equal *indivisible* essence.”

The French Confession (A.D. 1566) says, "We believe and acknowledge *ONE only* God, who is *ONE only* and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite," &c.

The English Confession (A.D. 1562) states, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, "be of *ONE* power, of *ONE* majesty, of *ONE* eternity, of *ONE* godhead, and *ONE* substance. And, although these three persons be so divided that neither the Father is the Son, nor the Son is the Holy Ghost, nor the Father, yet, nevertheless, we believe that there is but *ONE* very God."

The Confession of Belgia (A.D. 1566) declares, that "there is *ONE only* simple and spiritual essence, which we call God, eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite," &c.

The Articles of the English Episcopal Church declare, that "there is but *ONE* living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions," &c.

The Confession of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, revised at the Synod of Dort (A.D. 1618, 1619) declares, "We believe that there is *ONE only* and simple spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite," &c. (See *Harmony of Confessions*.)

With these agrees the Westminster Confession, approved by the General Assembly of Divines in A.D. 1647, adopted by all the Presbyterian Churches in Great Britain and America, and assented to by a great part of the Congregational Churches in New England. Its words are, "There is but *ONE only* living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible," &c. West. Con. p. 32.

Now, is *this* the denial of the divine *unity* with which we are implicitly charged? Can Unitarians present a more complete assertion of the *divine unity*, than is presented by these symbols of different denominations of Christians, who admit the doctrine of the Trinity?

But, admitting our statement of the divine unity to be correct, you will aver, probably, that my

second proposition is subversive of the first. Whether this be so, or not, is what I now propose to investigate.

The common language of the Trinitarian symbols is, “*That there are three PERSONS in the Godhead.*” In your comments upon this, you have all along explained the word *person*, as though it were a given point, that we use this word here, in its *ordinary* acceptation, as applied to *men*. But can you satisfy yourself that this is doing us justice? Is it not evident from Church history, that the word *person* was used, in ancient times, as a term which would express the disagreement of Christians in general, with the reputed errors of the Sabellians, and others of similar sentiments, who denied the existence of any *real distinction* in the Godhead, and asserted that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were merely *attributes* of God, or the names of different ways in which he revealed himself to mankind, or of different relations which he bore to them and in which he acted. Some of the principal Fathers and Councils meant to deny the correctness of such assertions, by using the word *person* to designate some *real*, not merely nominal distinction in the Godhead—to signify that something more than a diversity of relation or action, in respect to us, was intended. They seem to me to have used the word *person*, because they supposed it to approximate nearer to expressing the existence of a *real distinction*, than any other which they could choose.

We profess to use the word *person*, merely from

the poverty of language—merely to designate our belief of a real distinction in the Godhead; and not to describe independent, conscious beings possessing *separate* and *equal essences* and *perfections*. Why should we be obliged so often to explain ourselves on this point? Is there any more difficulty here, or any thing more obnoxious, than when you say, “God is angry with the wicked every day?” You defend yourself in the use of such an expression, by saying, that it is only the language of *approximation*, *i. e.* that it is intended to describe that, in the mind of the Deity, or in his actions, which corresponds in some measure, or in some respect, to anger in men,—not that he is really affected with the passion of anger. You will permit me then to add, that we speak of *person* in the Godhead to express that which, in some respect or other, corresponds to *persons* as applied to men,—*i. e.* *some distinction*; not that we attach to it the meaning of three beings, with a *separate* consciousness, will, omnipotence, omniscience, &c. Where then is our inconsistency in this, or the absurdity of our language, provided there is a real foundation in the Scriptures, on which may rest the *fact* of a distinction that we believe to exist?

I could heartily wish, indeed, that the word *person* never had come into the symbols of the Churches, because it has been the occasion of so much unnecessary dispute and difficulty. But since it has long been in common use, it is difficult, perhaps inexpedient, or even impossible, altogether to reject it. If it must be retained, I readily



concede that the use of it ought to be so explained and guarded, as not to lead Christians into erroneous ideas of the nature of God. Nor can I suppose that the great body of Christians have such ideas, or understand it to mean that which you attribute to us as believing. Then, surely, it is not the best mode of convincing your opponents, to take the word in a sense so different from that in which they understand it, and proceed to charge them with absurdities consequent upon the *language* of their creed. It has always been a conceded point, that, in the statement of difficult subjects, or the discussion of them, terms might be used in a sense somewhat different from their ordinary import. And what can declare in a plainer manner that Trinitarians do use the word *person* in this way, as applied to the divine Being, than the agreement among them that God is *numerically one*, in essence and in attributes?

It might have been justly expected likewise, that before they were charged with sentiments which subvert the divine Unity, the meaning of the word *person*, in the ancient records which describe its introduction into the technical language of the Church, should have been carefully investigated. One of your rules of exegesis, to which I have with all my heart assented, demands that “every *word* should be modified and explained, according to the *subject* which is discussed, according to the *PURPOSES*, feelings, *circumstances*, and principles of the writer.” Do us the justice to apply this law of interpretation to our language, and the

dispute between us about the meaning of the word *person*, is for ever at an end.

What then, you doubtless will ask, is that distinction in the Godhead, which the word *person* is meant to designate? I answer, without hesitation, that I do not know. The *fact* that a distinction exists, is what we aver; the definition of that distinction is what I shall by no means attempt. By what shall I, or can I define it? What simile drawn from created objects, which are necessarily derived and dependent, can illustrate the mode of existence in that Being who is underived, independent, unchangeable, infinite, eternal? I confess myself unable to advance a single step here in explaining what the distinction is. *I receive the FACT that it exists, simply because I believe that the Scriptures reveal the FACT.* And if the Scriptures do reveal the fact that there are three *persons* in the Godhead (in the sense explained); that there is a distinction which affords ground for the appellations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—which lays the foundation for the application of the personal pronouns, *I, thou, he*—which renders it proper to speak of *sending and being sent*, of Christ *being with God, being in his bosom*, and other things of the like nature; and yet that the divine nature belongs to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; then it is, like every other fact revealed, to be received simply on the credit of divine revelation.

Is there any more difficulty in understanding the fact that there is a distinction in the Godhead,

than there is in understanding that God possesses an underived existence? With what shall we compare such existence? All other beings are *derived*; and, of course, there is no object in the universe with whose existence it can be compared. To define it, then, is beyond our reach. We can approximate towards a conception of it, merely by negatives. We deny that the divine existence has any author or cause; and when we have done this, we have not defined it, but simply said that a certain thing *does not* belong to it. Here we must rest. The boundaries of human knowledge can never be extended beyond this.

The distinction in the Godhead which I have now mentioned, I ought to say here, we do not, and cannot consider as a mere subject of speculation, which has little or no concern with ardent piety, or the best hopes of the Christian. We believe that some of the most interesting and endearing exhibitions of the divine character, are founded upon it and connected with it; and that corresponding duties are urged upon us, and peculiar hopes excited, and consolations administered by it.

In regard to this distinction, we say, *It is not a mere distinction of attributes, of relation to us, of modes of action, or of relation between attributes and substance or essence*, so far as they are known to us. We believe the Scriptures justify us in these *negations*. But *here* we leave the subject. We undertake (at least the Trinitarians of our country, with whom I am acquainted, under-

take) *not* at all to describe *affirmatively* the distinction in the Godhead. When you will give me an affirmative description of *underived existence*, I may safely engage to furnish you with one of *person* in the Trinity. You do not reject the belief of self-existence, merely because you cannot *affirmatively define* it; neither do we of a distinction in the Godhead, because we cannot *affirmatively define* it.

I may ask, moreover, What is the *eternity* of God? You answer by telling me, that there never was a time when he did not exist, and never can be one when he will not exist. True; but then, what was *time* before the planetary system, which measures it, had an existence? And what will *time* be when these heavens and this earth shall be blotted out? Besides, passing over this difficulty about time, you have only given a negative description of God's eternity; you *deny* certain things of him, and then aver that he is *eternal*. Yet, because you cannot affirmatively describe eternity, you would not refuse to believe that God is *eternal*. Why, then, should I reject the belief of a distinction in the Godhead, because I cannot affirmatively define it?

I do not admit, therefore, that we are exposed justly to be taxed with mysticism and absurdity, when we aver there is a distinction in the Godhead, which we are utterly unable to define. I am aware, indeed, that a writer, some time since, composed and published, in a periodical work then edited at Cambridge, a piece in which he

laboured, with no small degree of acuteness, to show that no man can believe a proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible or which he does not understand. His object in doing this appears to have been to fix upon a belief in a doctrine of the Trinity the charge of absurdity. But it seems to me, the whole argument of that piece is founded on a confusion of two things, which are in themselves very diverse,—viz. *terms* which are *unintelligible*, and *things* which are *undefinable*. You believe in the *fact*, that the divine existence is without cause; you understand the *fact*, that God exists uncaused; but you cannot define underived existence. I believe, on the authority of the Scriptures, that there is a real distinction in the Godhead; but I cannot define it. Still the proposition that there is a *real distinction*, is just as intelligible as the one, that God is self-existent. A multitude of propositions, respecting diverse subjects, resemble these. We affirm, that gravitation brings a body thrown into the air down to the earth. The *fact* is perfectly intelligible. The terms are perfectly understood, so far as they are the means of describing this fact. But, then, what is gravitation? An affirmative definition cannot be given, which is not a mere exchange of synonymes. Nor can any comparison define it; for to what shall we liken it?

The mind of every man who is accustomed to think, will supply him with a multitude of propositions of this nature; in all of which, the *fact* designed to be described is clear. The terms, so



far as they describe this fact, are clear; but the *subject* of the proposition,—that is, the thing itself, or agent, concerning which the fact is asserted,—is undefinable; and, *excepting in regard to the fact in question*, perhaps wholly unknown to us.

How easy now to perplex common minds, by calling a *proposition unintelligible*, the *subject* of which is *undefinable*! In confounding things so very different, consists, as I apprehend, the whole ingenuity of the piece in question—an ingenuity which may excite the admiration of those who love the subtilties of dispute, but cannot contribute much to illuminate the path of theological science.

I have been thus particular in my statement of this very difficult part of the subject, in order to prevent misapprehension. I certainly do not hold myself bound to vindicate any of the *definitions* of *person* or of *distinction* in the Godhead which I have seen, because I do not adopt them. I do not and cannot understand them; and to a definition I cannot with propriety assent, (still less can I undertake to defend it,) until I do understand what it signifies. It is truly matter of regret that some great and good men have carried their speculations on this subject to such a length, that they have bewildered themselves and their readers. I would always speak with respect and tenderness of such men. Still I have no hesitation in saying, that my mind is absolutely unable to elicit any distinct and certain ideas from any of the definitions of *person* in the Godhead which I

have ever examined. A few examples of attempts at definition or illustration will vindicate the correctness of what I have just said.

Let me begin with Tertullian, who flourished about A. D. 200.

In his book against Praxeas, he says, "This perversity (viz. of Praxeas) thinks itself to be in possession of pure truth, while it supposes that we are to believe in one God, not otherwise than if we make the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the self same; as if all were not *one*, while all are of one, viz. *by a unity of substance*; and still the mysterious economy which distributes unity into a Trinity is observed, marking out [distinguishing] Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There are three, not in condition, but rank; not in essence, but form; not in power, but in kind; but of *one substance, one condition, and one power*; for there is *one* God, from whom all those ranks, and forms, and kinds, by the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are reckoned."

A little farther on he says, "Whatever therefore the substance of the Word (*Logos*) is, I call him a PERSON, and pay him reverence; and, acknowledging the Son, I maintain that he is *second* from the Father."

"The *third* is the Spirit from God and the Son, as the fruit from the stalk is the third from the root; a stream from the river, [the third] from the fountain; the sharp point from a ray [the third] from the sun. So the Trinity proceeds, by interlinked and connected grades, from the Father." (cap. 2.)

In cap. 9, he says, "They (the Trinity) are not separate from each other, although the Father is said to be diverse from the Son and the Spirit."

And again, "We are baptized into the persons (of the Trinity) severally, by the use of their several names."

It is proper to observe here how plainly and definitely the words *person* and *Trinity* are, at this very early age, applied by Tertullian to the Godhead; which contradicts the confident affirmations of some writers, that these terms were an invention of later ages and of scholastic divinity.

I may add, that the familiar and habitual use which Tertullian makes of these terms, proves that they were *commonly understood*, or at least used in the Church, at a period so early, and in reference to the very distinction in the Godhead, which is the subject of the present discussion.

The object which Tertullian aims at, in predicating *person* of the Godhead, is, as has been already remarked, to oppose the sentiment of Praxeas, who denied that there existed any distinction in the divine nature. But, to explain Tertullian's similitudes, designed to illustrate the nature of this distinction, and so frequently copied in after ages, is more than I shall undertake. Who does not see that all similitudes drawn from created, limited, dependent beings or things, must be utterly inadequate to illustrate the mode in which an uncreated, infinite, and omnipresent Being exists? What is the attempt at explanation, but "darkening words without knowledge?" I believe with Tertullian in a threefold distinction of the Godhead; but I believe simply *the fact of the Trinity*, and do not venture to make any attempt at explanation.

The venerable Council of Nice, held A. D. 325, have made an attempt, similar to that of the father just named, at definition or description. Their words are—"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father; God of God,

light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of the same substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

This Council, like the great body of the ancient fathers, believed in the doctrine of the *eternal generation* of the Son. This generation, from all eternity, appears to have been the distinctive point of difference between the Son and the Father (whom the ancient ecclesiastical writers often describe as *αγεννητος* *unbegotten*), on which they fixed their attention, and which they have plainly laboured in their creed to describe or illustrate. As *coeternal* with the Father, they regarded the Son,—of the *same substance*, they have asserted him to be. How then could he be begotten, or derived, if he were of the same substance and of the same eternity? To hold fast both these ideas, they said the Son was "God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of the same substance with the Father." They endeavoured to justify such expressions, by saying, that the light of the sun is coeval with it, and of the same substance; and by a multitude of similes of such a nature, drawn from created and material objects. How utterly incompetent all this must be to effect the object intended, is easy of apprehension, when we once reflect that the divine nature is self-existent, independent, and immutable.

The true occasion, however, why the Nicene fathers accumulated so many terms in their creed, must be found in their intention to oppose every form and species of Arianism, although they meant

to strike, as has been before observed, at other opinions which they disapproved. A slight consideration of the Nicene Creed might lead one, perhaps, to suppose, that undefinable or objectionable terms of illustration had been, almost intentionally, accumulated in it. The history of the introduction of these terms, however, may be found in the manner in which the Arians disputed with the Nicene fathers. "Being asked, whether they acknowledged the Son as begotten of the Father, they assented,—meaning that they acknowledged the derived existence of the Son from God, as well as that of all other beings. Did they acknowledge the Son as God?—Altogether so. Did they acknowledge him as the *true* God?—Undoubtedly: He must be the true God, who is constituted God. Was the Son of God a creature?—By no means (meaning, not a creature in the sense that other things were; these being *mediately* created by the Logos, but the Logos *immediately* by the Father.) But when the word *ὁμοουσιος* (*omousios*, *i.e.* the same in substance) was proposed, and it was decided that Christ was *consubstantial* with the Father, they never assented to this, as it excluded all hope of evasion."\* A sober inquirer may therefore find, perhaps, more reason to vindicate this term (so much agitated in the churches,) as used by the Nicene Fathers, than he might at first suspect.

After all, I am unable to conceive of any definite meaning in the phrase, *eternal generation*.

\* Athan. Epis. ad Afric.



*Generation* or *production*, like *creation*, necessarily implies in itself *beginning*; and of course contradicts the idea of absolute eternity. In so far as Christ is divine, *consubstantial* with the Father, he must, for aught that I can see, be necessarily regarded as self-existent, independent, and eternal. A being to whom these attributes do not belong, can never be regarded as God, except he be called so by a figurative use of the term. The *generation* or *production* of the Son of God, as *divine*, as *really and truly God*, seems to be out of question therefore, unless it be an express doctrine of revelation; which is so far from being the case, that I conceive the contrary is plainly taught. If the phrase *eternal generation*, then, is to be vindicated, it is only on the ground that it is figuratively used, to describe an indefinable connexion and discrimination between Father and Son, which is from everlasting. It is not well chosen, however, for this purpose, because it necessarily, even in its figurative use, carries along with it an idea which is at variance with the self-existence and independence of Christ, as divine; and of course, in so far as it does this, it seems to detract from his real divinity.

I cannot therefore understand what "God of God, light of light, very God of very God," means; nor can I think that any definite and positive ideas ever were or could be attached to these phrases. That the Nicene fathers meant to contradict Arius, is sufficiently plain to any one conversant with the history of the Council of Nice. But that they have made out a positive,

or affirmative and intelligible definition of the distinction between Father and Son, I presume no one, at the present day, will hardly venture to assert.

The Council of Constantinople (A. D. 381,) in their Synodic Epistle to the Western Bishops, have shown the manner in which the doctrine of the Trinity was stated and defended in their day. They adopted and enlarged the Nicene symbol, so as to strike at the opinions of Macedonius; and then, in their Synodic letter, gave the sum of what they had done or what they believed. My objection to their language is, that it is too affirmative. “Three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect persons,” though aimed to contradict Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, and others of like sentiments, is an attempt to define too far. *Hypostases*, or *persons*, in the sense of *distinction* in the Godhead, may be admissible through the penury of language. But most *perfect hypostases*, *perfect persons*, is attempting to make the *distinction* more a matter of definition than it can be made. I believe that what they designed to assert is substantially true; but I cannot adopt, because I cannot regard as intelligible, all their language.

Let us leave antiquity now, and glance for a moment at some of the similar attempts at definition or illustration in modern times. The celebrated Leibnitz was requested by Loeffler, who had undertaken to refute the writings of a certain English Antitrinitarian, to give him an affirmative definition of the persons in the Godhead. He

sent for answer the following: "Several persons in an absolute substance numerically the same, signify several, particular, intelligent substances essentially related." On farther consideration, he abandoned this, and sent a second; which was, "Several persons, in an absolute substance numerically the same, mean relative, incommunicable modes of subsisting."

If Leibnitz actually understood this, I believe he must have been a better master of metaphysics than any person who has ever read his definition. In fact, he does not himself appear to have been satisfied with it; for, not long after, he wrote as follows,—“We must say, that there are *relations* in the divine substance, which distinguish the *persons*, since these persons cannot be absolute substances. But we must aver, too, that these relations are substantial. At least we must say that the Divine Persons are not the same Concrete, under different denominations or relations; as a man may be, at the same time, both a poet and an orator. We must say, moreover, that the three persons are not as absolute substances as the whole.”\*

This is somewhat better than either of his former attempts, inasmuch as it is confined principally to description of a negative kind. Yet, after all, I obtain by it no additional light upon the subject, which is important.

With quite as little success did that original

\* Remarques sur le livre d'un Antitrinitaire Anglois, p. 26.

genius and masterly reasoner, the celebrated Toellner of Frankfort, labour to define the subject in question.

“It is certain,” says he, “that we must conceive, as coexisting in God, three eternal and really different actions—the action of activity, of idea, and of the desire of all possible good within and without him.

“Three really different actions, coexisting from eternity, necessarily presuppose three really different and operative substrata. It is thus, through the aid of reason illuminated by the Scriptures, we come to know that the power, the understanding, and the will of God, are not merely three faculties, but three distinct energies, that is, three substances.” (Vermisch. Aufsätze. B. I. p. 81.)

Tertullian’s explication, or the Nicene Creed, is at least as intelligible to me as this.

I have not produced these instances in order to satisfy you that all attempts of this nature are and must be fruitless:—you doubtless need no such proof. I have produced them for two reasons;—*the first*, to justify myself, in some measure, for not attempting a definition, in which no one has yet succeeded; *the second*, to show that, notwithstanding all the fruitless attempts at definition which have been made, and notwithstanding the variety of method in which men have chosen to make these attempts, yet *for substance*, there is a far greater unanimity of opinion among Trinitarians than you and your friends *seem* to be willing to concede. I grant freely, that there is a great variety in the mode by which an attempt at definition or illustration is made. With my present views, I can never look upon any attempts of this nature but with regret. But I am very far from

accusing them generally of any ill design,—much less can I treat them with contempt.

Patient investigation and candour will lead one to believe, as it seems to me, that the *thing aimed at was, in substance, to assert the idea of a distinction in the Godhead*. To do this with the more success, as they imagined, they endeavoured to describe *affirmatively* the nature of that distinction. Here they have all failed. But does this prove that there is actually a great variety of opinion among Trinitarians, in regard to the principal thing concerned, merely because endeavours to define this thing have produced a great variety of illustration? I cannot help feeling that this matter is sometimes misrepresented, and very generally but little understood.

And now, can you, by arguing *à priori*, prove to me that the doctrine of the Trinity is inconsistent with itself, or “subversive of the doctrine of the divine unity,” and therefore untrue? We say the divine essence and attributes are *numerically one*, so far as they are known to us, but that there is in the Godhead a *real distinction* between the Father and the Son. (I omit the consideration of the Holy Spirit here, because your sermon merely hints at this subject, and because all difficulties, in respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, are essentially connected with proving or disproving the divinity of Christ.) *We abjure all attempts to define that distinction—we admit it simply as a fact, on the authority of divine revelation*. Now, how can you prove that



a distinction does *not* exist in the Godhead? I acknowledge that the want of evidence in the Scriptures to establish the fact, would be a sufficient reason for rejecting it. But we are now making out a statement of the subject, and answering objections that are urged *à priori*, or independently of the Scriptures. The proof, which the New Testament exhibits, we are hereafter to examine. How then, I repeat it, are you to show that we believe in a self-contradiction, or in an impossibility? If the distinction in question cannot be *proved*, independently of the Scriptures, (and most freely I acknowledge it cannot,) it is equally certain that it cannot in this manner be *disproved*. In order to prove that this distinction contradicts the divine unity, must you not be able to tell what it is, and what the divine unity is? Can you do either?

Allow me for a moment to dwell on the subject now casually introduced. It is a clear point, I think, that the unity of God cannot be proved without revelation. It may perhaps be rendered faintly probable. Then you depend on Scripture proof for the establishment of this doctrine. But have the Scriptures anywhere told us what the *divine unity* is? Will you produce the passage? The *oneness* of God they assert: but this they assert always, *in opposition to the idols of the heathen*—the *polytheism* of the Gentiles—the gods superior and inferior, which they worshipped. In no other sense have the Scriptures defined the ONENESS of the Deity. What, then, is *oneness*, in

the uncreated, infinite, and eternal Being? In created and finite objects, we have a distinct perception of what we mean by it; but can *created* objects be just and adequate representatives of the *uncreated* ONE? Familiar as the assertion is, in your conversation and in your sermons, that God is ONE, can you give me any definition of this *oneness*, except a negative one? That is, you deny plurality of it. You say God is but one, and not two or more. Still, in what, I ask, does the divine unity consist? Has not God different and various faculties and powers? Is he not almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, just, and good? Does he not act differently, *i.e.* variously, in the natural and in the moral world? Does his unity consist, then, appropriately in his essence? But what is the essence of God? And how can you assert that his unity consists appropriately in this, unless you know what his essence is, and whether oneness can be any better predicated of this than of his attributes?

Your answer to all this is—"The nature of God is beyond my reach: I cannot define it. I approach to a definition of the divine unity only by negatives." That is, you deny the numerical plurality of God; or you say there are not two or more essences, omnisciences, omnipotences, &c. But here all investigation is at an end. Is it possible to show what constitutes the *internal nature* of the divine essence or attributes, or how they are related to each other, or what internal distinctions exist? About all this, revelation says

not one word,—certainly the book of Nature gives no instruction concerning it. The assertion, then, that God is *one*, can never be fairly understood as meaning any thing more than that he is *numerically one*,—*i. e.* it simply denies polytheism, and never can reach beyond this. But how does this prove, or how can it prove, that there may not be, or that there are not, distinctions in the Godhead, either in regard to attributes or essence, the nature of which is unknown to us, and the existence of which is to be proved, by the authority of the Scriptures only?

When Unitarians, therefore, inquire what that distinction in the Godhead is in which we believe, we answer, that we do not profess to understand *what* it is: we do not undertake to define it *affirmatively*. We can approximate to a definition of it only by negatives. We deny that the Father is in *all* respects the same as the Son; and that the Holy Spirit is in *all* respects the same as either the Father or the Son. We rest the *fact*, that a distinction exists, solely upon the basis of revelation.

In principle, then, what more difficulty lies in the way of believing in a threefold distinction of the Godhead, than in believing in the divine unity?

I am certainly willing to allow, that the evidences of the divine unity in the New Testament are sufficient. But I may be permitted to suggest here, that, in my view, *the passages asserting it are fewer in number than the passages which assert or imply that Christ is truly divine*. I cannot but think that the frequent assertions of your

sermon, and of Unitarians in general, with regard to this subject, are very erroneous; that they are made at hazard, and without a diligent and faithful comparison of the number of texts that respect the divine unity in the New Testament, and the number of those which concern the divinity of the Saviour. After all, to what purpose is it that so great a multitude of texts should be required to prove the divinity of Christ, by those who believe, as you do, that the decisions of the Scriptures are of divine authority? The decision of one text fairly made out by the laws of exegesis, is as authoritative as that of a thousand. Would a law a thousand times repeated have any more *authority* attached to it for the repetition? It might be better explained by the repetition in different connexions; but its *authority* is uniformly the same.

But, to return from this digression, suppose I should affirm that two subjects, A and B, are *numerically* identical in regard to something called X, but diverse or distinct in regard to something else called Y, is there any absurdity or contradiction in this affirmation? I hope I shall not, by making this supposition, be subjected to the imputation of endeavouring to prove the doctrine of the Trinity by the science of Algebra; for my only object in proposing this statement, is to illustrate the answer that we make to a very common question which Unitarians put us—"How can three be one, and one three?"—In no way, I necessarily and cheerfully reply. "How, then, is the doctrine of the Trinity in unity to be vindicated?"—In a manner which is

not at all embarrassed by these questions. *We do not maintain that the Godhead is three in the same respects that it is one, but the reverse.* In regard to X, we maintain its numerical unity: in regard to Y, we maintain a threefold distinction. I repeat it: *We maintain simply the fact, that there is such a distinction on Scripture authority.* We do not profess to understand in what it consists.

Will you not concede now, provided the statements made above are correct, that we are not very unreasonable, when we complain, that, from the time in which Tertullian maintained the doctrine of the Trinity against Praxeas, down to the present period, the views and statements of Trinitarians, in regard to this subject, should have been so frequently misunderstood or misrepresented?

I have dwelt sufficiently on my statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the difficulties that lie in the way of proving this statement to be erroneous or contradictory. Before I proceed to the next topic, I will merely mention, in a brief way, two of the most formidable objections to our views which I have seen, and which were adduced by two men, who must be reckoned among the most intelligent that have embraced the cause of Unitarianism. The first is from Faustus Socinus, and runs thus:

“No one is so stupid as not to see that these things are contradictory—that our God, the creator of heaven and earth, should be *one only* in number, and yet be three, each of which is our God. For as to what they affirm that our God is one in number, in respect to his essence, but threefold in regard to persons; here again they affirm things



which are self-contradictory, since two or three persons cannot exist, where there is numerically only one individual essence; for, to constitute more than one person, more than one individual essence is required. For what is person, but a certain individual intelligent essence? Or in what way, I pray, does one person differ from another, unless by the diversity of his individual or numerical essence? This implies, that the divine essence is numerically *one* only, yet that there is more than one person; although the divine essence, which is numerically one, and divine person are altogether identical." (Opp. tom. i. p. 697.)

Here, however, it is obvious that the whole weight of the objection lies in an erroneous use of the words *person* and *essence*. Socinus attaches to them a sense which Trinitarians do not admit. How then can Trinitarians be charged with inconsistencies, in propositions which they do not make?

Of the same tenour with the objection of Socinus, is the objection mentioned by the famous Toellner,\* which, to save room, I shall merely translate, without subjoining the original.

"The most considerable objection (against the doctrine of the Trinity,) is this," says he, "that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are each a particular substance endowed with understanding; and, at the same time, neither of them is said to have his separate being, his separate understanding, his separate will, his separate power of action; but all three together have only one being, one understanding, one will, one power of action. As it appears, then, it is affirmed that there are three real beings, truly separate; each consequently having his own individual power of action, and not having it; three *separate* persons, and three persons *not separate*."

All the difficulty which this masterly writer has, in his usual way, so strikingly portrayed, lies merely in the representations of those Trinitarians,

\* Theolog. Untersuchungen, b. 1. p. 29.

who have expressed themselves on this subject so incautiously, as to be understood to affirm that there are three separate beings (persons in the *common* sense of the word,) in the Godhead, with distinct powers, volitions, &c. If there be any now who defend such a statement of this subject, I must leave them to compose the difficulty with Toellner as they can. The view of the doctrine of the Trinity given by Toellner, in his statement of the objection, is not that which I have presented, or which I should ever undertake to defend. Of course it cannot be adduced as an objection against the statement which I have given, and have undertaken to defend.

The second objection appears, at first sight, more formidable and perplexing. It comes from Taylor, and was inserted in the *English Theological Magazine*, Vol. I. No. 4, p. 111. 1770. I have not opportunity of access to the original, and take the ideas from a Latin translation of the piece, which was published in Germany.

“There can,” says Taylor, “be no real distinction between the Father and the Son, unless they so differ from each other, that what is peculiar to the Father, is wanting in the Son; and what is peculiar to the Son, is wanting in the Father. Now, that property which belongs exclusively to the Father, or the Son, must be numbered among the perfections of God; for in the divine nature no imperfections can exist. It follows then, that some perfection is lacking both in the Father and in the Son, so that neither is endowed with infinite perfection, which is essential to the divine nature. It must be conceded then, that the essence of the Father and the Son is not one and the same.”

Ingenious and specious as this is, still I am unable to see that it settles the point in debate. The essence and attributes of God, so far as they are known to us, are *numerically one*, as we have already admitted. If by "*perfection*," Taylor means *all* which belongs to the Godhead, then I answer merely by saying, it is essential to the perfection of the Godhead, that the distinction between the Father and Son should exist; for that otherwise there would be imperfection. My right to make such a statement, is just the same as his to make the assertion, that the distinction between Father and Son involved an imperfection in each. The very distinction between the Father and Son is essential to complete divinity; and, did not these exist, something would be wanting to complete the perfection of the Godhead. I acknowledge this is assumption; but so is Taylor's statement; and an argument which is built on assumption, may surely be opposed by another argument which has the same foundation.

My object in the present Letter has been, thus far, to compare our views of the Trinity with those which you have ascribed to us; to show that we are not exposed, on account of our belief, to be justly charged with gross and palpable absurdity, or with "subverting the unity of the Godhead;" and to prove that the question, after all, whether there is a distinction in the Godhead, must be referred solely to the decision of the Scriptures.

To them I shall appeal, as soon as I have made

a few remarks on the twofold nature which we ascribe to Christ. You say (p. 11.)

“ We (Unitarians) believe in the *unity of Jesus Christ*. We believe that Jesus is one mind, one soul, one being, as truly one as we are, and equally distinct from the one God. We complain of the doctrine of the Trinity, that, not satisfied with making God three beings, it makes Jesus Christ two beings, and thus introduces infinite confusion into our conceptions of his character. This corruption of Christianity, alike repugnant to common sense, and to the general strain of Scripture, is a remarkable proof of the power of a false philosophy in disfiguring the simple truth of Jesus.”

You will admit that this is expressed in terms of severity. Whether we are really deserving of it, who hold the doctrine in question, every lover of truth will permit to be brought to the test of fair examination.

I am not certain that I have rightly apprehended your meaning, when you say that the twofold nature of Christ is “repugnant to *common sense*.” Do you mean that common sense may determine first, independently of revelation, that the doctrine cannot be true; and then maintain the impossibility that revelation should exhibit it? If so, then we are able to decide, *à priori*, what can be revealed, and what cannot; consequently, what we may believe, and what we must disbelieve. It follows, then, that a revelation is unnecessary, or rather that it is impossible,—at least one which shall be obligatory upon our belief; for we have only to say, that our common sense decides against the propriety or the possibility of the

things said to be revealed, and then we are at liberty to reject them.

But is this the proper sphere in which *common sense* should act? It is not true that common sense is limited to judging of the evidences that the Bible is of divine origin and authority; to establishing the rules of exegesis common to all languages and books; and, finally, to directing a fair and impartial application of those rules, to determine what the original writer of any portion of the Scriptures designed to inculcate? Having once admitted, as you have, the divine authority of the Scripture in deciding all questions, and your obligation to submit to its decision when you can understand the meaning of it, by using the common rules of interpretation, how is it to be determined by *common sense* whether Christ has two natures or one? Common sense may investigate the language of the inspired writers, and inquire what they have said: and if, by the sound rules of interpretation, it should appear that they have ascribed two natures to Christ, or asserted that which unavoidably leads to the conclusion that he has two natures, then, either it is to be believed, or the authority of the writers is to be cast off. In rejecting any doctrine which the language of Scripture plainly teaches, *common sense* must cast off the divine authority of the Bible. To receive the Bible as a revelation from God, and yet to decide, *à priori*, what the Scriptures can and what they cannot contain, and to make their language bend until it conform with



this decision, cannot surely be a proper part for a sincere lover of truth and sober investigation.

In saying, then, that the doctrine which teaches that Christ has two natures, is “repugnant to common sense,” I presume you must mean that the rules of exegesis, applied by common sense, lead unavoidably to the conclusion that Christ has but one nature. If this be your meaning, what I have to say in reply will be contained in my next Letter.

In regard to the impossibility that Christ should possess two natures, and the absurdity of such a supposition, I have not much to say. If the Scriptures are the Word of God, and do contain the doctrine in question, it is neither impossible nor absurd. Most certainly, if it be a fact that Christ possesses two natures, it is a fact with which natural religion has no concern; at least, of which it has no knowledge. It can therefore decide neither for nor against it. It is purely a doctrine of revelation; and to Scripture only can we look for evidences of it. If the doctrine be palpably absurd and contradictory to reason, and yet it is found in the Bible, then reject the claims of the Bible to inspiration and truth. But if the laws of interpretation do not permit us to avoid the conclusion that it is found there, we cannot with any consistency admit that the Scriptures are of divine authority, and yet reject the doctrine.

How shall any man decide, *à priori*, that the doctrine cannot be true? Can we limit the omniscient and omnipotent God, by saying that the

Son cannot be so united with human nature, so “become flesh and dwell among us,” that we recognise and distinguish in this complex being but one person, and therefore speak of but one? If you ask me how such a union can be effected between natures so infinitely diverse as the divine and human, I answer (as in the case of the distinction in the Godhead,) I do not know *how* this is done; *I do not undertake to define wherein that union consists, nor how it is effected.* God cannot divest himself of his essential perfections,—*i. e.* he is immutably perfect; nor could the human nature of Christ have continued to be human nature, if it had ceased to be subject to the infirmities,\* and sorrows, and affections of this nature, while he dwelt among men. In whatever way, then, the union of the two natures was effected, it neither destroyed nor essentially changed either the divine or human nature.

Hence, at one time, Christ is represented as the creator of the universe; and, at another, as

\* This statement, though strictly and essentially true, might, at first sight, seem to lean rather to the avowed opinion of Dr. Priestley and other Unitarians, that Christ was “naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses or any other prophet:”—an opinion which strikes at the root of the gospel plan of salvation. If the author could, by a possibility, have used the word “*infirmity*” in that sense in which Unitarian writers use it, and as they use such phrases as “*human frailty*,” &c. *i. e.* to denote the utmost idea they can conceive of the character and nature of sin; then his statement would be dangerous indeed, and opposed to the truths he is advocating. The ground of the author’s accurate statement may be seen in Heb. iv. 15;—and by “*infirmities*” he gives the force of the ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, of the original, which certainly does not mean any thing that partakes of the heinous nature of sin, however infirmities may be among the consequences of it.—EDITOR.

a man of sorrows, and of imperfect knowledge. (John i. 1—18; Hebrews i. 10—12; Luke xxii. 44, 45; ii. 52.) If both these accounts are true, he must, as it seems to me, be God omniscient and omnipotent; and still a feeble man and of imperfect knowledge. It is, indeed, impossible to reconcile these two things without the supposition of two natures. The simple question then is, Can they be joined or united, so that, in speaking of them, we may say the person is God or man; or we may call him by one single name, and by this understand, as designated, either or both of these natures? On this subject, the religion of nature says nothing. Reason has nothing to say; for surely no finite being is competent to decide that the junction of the two natures is impossible or absurd.

*One person*, in the sense in which each of us is one, Christ could not be. If you make God the soul, and Jesus of Nazareth the body of Christ, then you take away his human nature, and deny the imperfection of his knowledge. But may not God have been, in a manner altogether peculiar and mysterious, united to Jesus, without displaying at once his whole power in him, or necessarily rendering him supremely perfect? In the act of creation, God does not put forth all his power—nor in preservation—nor in sanctification; nor does he bring all his knowledge into action when he inspires prophets and apostles. Was it necessary that he should exert it all when in conjunction with the human nature of Christ? In

governing the world from day to day, God does not surely exhaust his omnipotence or his wisdom. He employs only so much as is necessary to accomplish the design which he has in view. In his union with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine *Logos* could not, of course, be necessitated at once to put forth all his energy, or exhibit all his knowledge and wisdom. Just so much of it, and no more, was manifested as was requisite to constitute the character of an all-sufficient incarnate Mediator and Redeemer. When necessary, power and authority infinitely above human were displayed; when otherwise, the human nature sympathised and suffered like that of other men.

Is this impossible for God? Is there any thing in such a doctrine which, if found in the Bible, would afford an adequate reason for rejecting its claims to inspiration? For my own part I cannot see the impossibility or the absurdity of such a thing. How shall we limit the Deity as to the ways in which he is to reveal himself to his creatures?

Can we not find mystery within ourselves which is as inexplicable as any thing in the doctrine before us? We do not appropriate the affections of our minds to our bodies, nor those of our bodies to our minds; each class of affections is separate and distinct. Yet we refer either to the *whole* man. Abraham was mortal; Abraham was immortal: are both equally true? He had an immortal and a mortal part; yet both made but *one person*. How is it a greater mystery, if I say

Christ was God, and Christ was man? He had a nature human and divine. One person, indeed, in the sense in which Abraham was, he is not. Nor is there any created object to which the union of Godhead with humanity can be compared. But shall we deny the possibility of it on this account? Or shall we tax with absurdity that which it is utterly beyond our reach to scan? I shrink from such an undertaking, and place myself in the attitude of listening to what the voice of revelation may dictate in regard to this. It *becomes* us here to do so—to prostrate ourselves before the Father of Lights, and say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear. Lord, what wilt thou have us to believe?”

You may indeed find fault with us that we speak of *three persons* in the Godhead where there is but *one nature*; and yet of but *one person* in Christ where there are *two natures*. I admit that it is an apparent inconsistency in the use of language; and cannot but wish that it had not originally been adopted. Still it is capable of some explanation. In the first case, *person* simply designates the idea that there is some *real* distinction in the Godhead, in opposition to the opinion that it is merely *nominal*. In the second, it designates Christ as he appears to us in the New Testament, clothed with a human body, and yet acting (as we suppose) not only as possessing the attributes of a man, but as also possessing divine power. We see the attributes of human nature in such intimate conjunction with those of the divine, that we



cannot separate the agents; at least we know not where to draw the line of separation, because we do not know the manner in which the union is effected or continued. We speak therefore of one *person*,—*i.e.* one agent. And when we say that the two natures of Christ are united in one person, we mean to say that divinity and humanity are brought into such a connexion in this case, that we cannot separate them so as to make two entirely distinct and separate agents.

The present generation of Trinitarians, however, do not feel responsible for the introduction of such technical terms, in senses so diverse from the common ideas attached to them. They merely take them as they find them. For my own part I have no attachment to them; I think them injudiciously chosen, and heartily wish they were by general consent entirely exploded. They serve perhaps, in most cases, principally to keep up the form of words without definite ideas; and I fear they have been the occasion of many disputes in the Church. The *things* which are aimed at by these terms, I would strenuously retain; because I believe in the divine origin and authority of the Bible; and that its language, fairly interpreted, does inculcate these things. And candour on your part will certainly admit, that *things only* are worth any dispute. Logomachy is too trifling for a lover of truth.

## LETTER III.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

My great object hitherto, has been to show that the real question at issue between us, in regard to a distinction in the Godhead and the divinity of the Saviour, cannot be decided independently of the Scriptures. There is no such absurdity or inconsistency in either of these doctrines, as will justify us in rejecting them without investigation. The question whether they are true or not, belongs *entirely* and *purely* to revelation. If you admit this, then the simple question between us is, what does revelation teach? We are agreed that the Bible is the word of God; that whatever "Christ taught, either during his personal ministry or by his inspired apostles, is of divine authority." We are agreed as to *principles* of interpretation, in most things that are of importance. We both concede, that the principles by which all books are to be interpreted, are those which apply to

the interpretation of the Bible; for the very plain reason which you have given, that when God condescends to speak and write for men, it is according to the established rules of human language. What better than an enigma would the Scriptures be, if such were not the fact? An *inspired interpreter* would be as necessary to explain, as an inspired prophet or apostle was to compose, the books of Scripture.

From this great and fundamental principle of the Scriptural writings, viz. that they are composed agreeably to the common laws of human language, it results, that the grammatical analysis of the words of any passage, *i. e.* an investigation of their usual and general meaning, of their syntactical connexion, of their idiom, and of their relation to the context, must be the essential process in determining the sense of any text or part of Scripture. On this fundamental process depends the interpretation of all the classics, and of all other books. In conformity to this process, rules of interpretation are prescribed which cannot be violated without at once plunging into the dark and boundless field of conjectural exegesis. I may obtain aid from many sources, to throw light upon the meaning of words and sentences. From a knowledge of the geography of any country—of its climate, soil, productions, mountains, rivers, and other natural objects, as well as of the manners, customs, laws, history, &c., of its inhabitants—I may obtain assistance to explain its language, and must obtain it if I mean to make out

a satisfactory interpretation. But I can never dispense with the laws of grammatical analysis. These laws are vindicated by the simple fact, that every writer wishes and expects to be understood by his cotemporaries, and therefore may be expected to use language as they do. We presume this of the sacred writers; and therefore apply to their productions, as to those of classic authors, the common rules of grammatical interpretation.

Admitting these rules to be the best and surest guide to the meaning of language, we cannot supersede them by *supposing*, or *conjecturing*, peculiarities in a writer. It is only when these peculiarities are proved, or at least rendered probable, that they can be admitted to influence our interpretation of any passage. Without such proof, we cannot violate the obvious principles of grammatical interpretation, for the sake of vindicating from inconsistency, absurdity, or contradiction, any author, even a scriptural one.

I must here explain myself, however, in order to prevent mistake in regard to my meaning. The Scriptures certainly stand on different ground from that on which any other book rests, on account of their claim to be received as a revelation from God. What other book can plead well-authenticated miracles for its support; or can produce declarations of a prophetic nature that have been fulfilled; or can glory in such an exhibition of the principles of piety and virtue—of love to God, and of benevolence and beneficence to men? Just in proportion, then, as these evi-

dences influence my mind to believe that the Bible is of divine origin, in the same proportion it becomes improbable to me that this Bible contains absurdities, errors, or contradictions.\* When any *apparent* error or contradiction attracts my attention, I hesitate to pronounce it such as it appears to be. My reason for doing so is the strength of the evidence in favour of its divine origin; which is such, that I must do violence to my convictions, if I admit that the book contains either what is erroneous or contradictory. I am, then, slow to attribute, in any case, such a sense to words in the Scriptures, as would make a passage speak either absurdity or contradiction. But if, after all the light which I could gain, it should appear still to be a *plain case*, that there is either absurdity or contradiction in the sacred text; then I must find a different reading—or give up the

\* It would have been a happy thing for Dr. Priestley, and other leaders amongst English Socinians, could they, like sincere lovers of *truth*, have taken their stand upon a fair and simple argument like this, and so have avoided the many absurdities into which they fell, as to the inspiration of the Scriptures. Dr. Priestley, surely, could not foresee the result to which his notion would lead, when he maintained that some of the New Testament writers were so misled by Jewish prejudices as to quote improperly some texts of the Old Testament. He surely must have forgotten, that if the New Testament writers were misled by their prejudices in their application of *one* text, they must, from the same cause, have been equally *liable* to be misled in their application of others; and so would have been incapable of giving any real warrant for our believing them in their application of *any* passage. Better (certainly more honest) had it been for Dr. Priestley and his party to have denied the inspiration of the Scriptures *in toto*, than, under colour of an admission of some sort or degree of inspiration, to aim at undermining the basis of our faith in the Scriptures as the infallible and unchangeable word of God.—EDITOR.



passage—or renounce the whole book. I may suspend an opinion, while I live, as to *doubtful* cases. My convictions respecting the nature and design of the Holy Scriptures, the imperfection of my knowledge, diffidence in myself—all *demand* that I should act in this manner. But in any *clear* case, where the meaning of a sacred writer, or what he originally designed to say, can be *definitely* ascertained by the common laws of interpretation—and it appears plainly that this meaning is erroneous, or contradicts some other passage—I have no right to put a constructive sense upon the words, and do violence to the passage, in order to avoid the consequences that may follow. I cannot honestly do it. The same common sense and reason which prescribe the laws of exegesis, decide that the meaning of a writer must be that which those laws determine it to be. Of course, if I put a gloss upon any passage, which represents it as conveying a meaning different from that which the laws of interpretation would assign to it, I may deceive others, or I may serve the interests of party ; but I violate the reason which God has given me by so doing, and act a part dishonest, and unworthy of an inquirer after truth.

If the fundamental maxims of exegesis lead to the belief that a writer of the New Testament has contradicted himself, or another sacred writer, then I must revert at once to the question, Is the book divine? Can it be so, if there is contradiction? This question I may settle (on my responsibility to

God) as I please. But I have no right to violate the fundamental rules of language, by forcing a meaning upon the writer to make him consistent; which it is obvious, on the universal principles of explaining language, he never designed to convey. In determining the question, whether the writers of the New Testament were inspired, I must always, in attending to the internal evidence of the books, consider whether they have contradicted each other. To determine this question, I cannot violate the simple rules of grammatical exegesis. I must read this book as I do all other books. Then, if there evidently be contradiction, I must reject its claims; if there be not, and I think the evidence is sufficient that they are well-founded, I must admit them. But, at any period subsequent to this, when I have admitted the book to be inspired, I am not at liberty to aver that the writers could never have taught some particular doctrine which I may dislike; and therefore to do violence to the rules of grammatical interpretation, in order to explain away a doctrine of this nature, which they seem to inculcate. My simple inquiry must be, what sentiment does the language of this or that passage convey, without violence or perversion of rule? When this question is settled *philologically* (not *philosophically*), then I either believe what is taught, or else reject the claim of divine authority. What can my own theories and reasonings about the absurdity or reasonableness of any particular doctrine, avail in determining whether a writer of the New Testament *has taught* this doctrine or not? My investigation

must be conducted independently of my *philosophy*, by my *philology*. And when I have obtained his meaning by the simple and universal rules of expounding language, I choose the course I will take ; I must believe his assertion, or reject his authority.

If these be not sound maxims of interpretation, I confess myself a stranger to the subject ; nor can I help thinking that you will accord with me at once in the views just expressed.

Guided then by these principles, let us now come to the investigation of a few passages in the New Testament, which concern the divine nature of Christ. I take this point because you have dwelt most upon it ; and because very obviously, when this is admitted or rejected, no possible objection can be felt to admitting or rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity.

You will not require of me, however, to examine at length every text of the New Testament, which I may suppose to have any connexion with the subject in question. I must be permitted, in order to save time, to select only those texts, the language of which appears to be genuine, and above the condemnation of textual criticism ; and such as appear to contain the best and most decisive proof of the point to be discussed. Believing the New Testament to be of divine origin and authority, you will permit me to add that I cannot think the decision of this or any other question, depends on the number of times in which the terms of their decision are repeated.

I observe, then,

I. *The new Testament gives to Christ the appellation of GOD, in such a manner as that, according to the fair rules of interpretation, only the SUPREME GOD can be meant.*

A conspicuous passage in proof of this I should find in John i. 1—3. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Verse 10, “and the world was made by him.”

All known manuscripts agree in the text here. Griesbach has indeed recorded, that, for *ὁ Θεός* (*Theos, God*) there is a conjectural reading *Θεόν*; and that for *καὶ Θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος*, there is a conjectural reading of *Θεός ἦν καὶ ὁ λόγος*. The first of these conjectures was made by Crellius. (*Initium Evang. Johan. restauratum per L. M. Artemonium, P. i. c. 2.*) The reason of making such a conjecture Crellius has given.

“The greater Christ is,” says he, “compared with other gods (the Father excepted), the less can he be expressly called God, *lest he should be taken for the supreme God the Father.*” And again: “If he (Christ) had been expressly called God by the sacred writers, and had not always been distinguished from God, *the sacred writers would have given an occasion to unskilful men to regard him as the supreme God.*” (*Init. Evang. Johan. p. 295.*)

To liberate John from being taxed with this imprudence, Crellius proposed to substitute *Θεόν*

for Θεός, in John i. 1; so as to say, *the Logos was of God*, instead of saying, as John has done, that *He was God*.

The second conjectural reading is supported by no better authority. Bahrdt (in *Neuesten Offenbarungen*) proposed it as a happy expedient to relieve the text from the difficulty and embarrassment under which he thought it laboured. For, instead of saying, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” he might then translate it thus,—“The Word was with God. God was, and this Word was in the beginning with God,” &c.

I have a great regard for the labours and learning of Griesbach; but I am constrained to ask here, why he should have condescended to notice conjectures so gratuitous and unfounded as these?

✓ I proceed to the explanation of the text. *Εν αρχῇ* (*i. e.* in the beginning) corresponds exactly with the Hebrew, Gen. i. 1.\* I cannot embrace the opinion of those critics, who think that the phrase *εν αρχῇ*, of itself *simply* signifies *from eternity*. Although I believe that the *Logos* did exist from eternity, I do not think it is proved *directly* by this expression. (Compare Gen. i. 1.) That existence from eternity is *implied*, however, may be properly admitted. *Εν αρχῇ* is equivalent to *εν αρχῇ κοσμου*, *in the beginning of the world, i. e.* before the world was made; and so agreeing in

\* The Hebrew words are omitted in this and some other passages, partly for want of types for the Hebrew characters, and partly because their insertion would be of little use to the general reader. The biblical student may however consult the original Hebrew.



this particular with the phrase, (John xvii. 5), “the glory that I had with thee before the world was;” and Eph. i. 4, “before the foundation of the world.” To say with Crellius, that, by *ἐν ἀρχῇ* is meant the *commencement* of preaching the gospel, or the beginning of Christian instruction, would be making John gravely tell us, that before the *Logos* preached the gospel, he had an existence.

Before the world was created, then, the *Logos* existed. Who or what was this *Logos*? A real existence, or only an attribute of God? A real substance, or only the wisdom, or reason, or power of God?

It is of no importance in settling this question that we should know with certainty whence John derived the appellation *Logos*. In my mind the most probable account is, that this appellation is bestowed on Christ, in reference to his becoming the instructor or teacher of mankind—the medium of communication between God and them. Be this however as it may, the *Logos* appears to be a *real existence*, and not merely an *attribute*. For, *first*,—The attributes of God are nowhere else *personified* by the New Testament writers, *i. e.* the usage of the New Testament authors is against this mode of writing. *Secondly*,—*Logos*, if considered as an abstract term, or as merely designating an attribute, must mean either *wisdom* or *word*; and in what intelligible sense can the *wisdom* or the *word* of God, in the abstract sense, be said to have “*become flesh and dwelt among us*,”

(v. 14); or why should John select either the *wisdom* or *word* of God as any more concerned with the incarnation than the *benevolence of God*, or the *mercy of God*, which one might suppose would be the attributes more especially displayed in the incarnation? *Thirdly*,—If *Logos* mean here the *power* of God, as many assert, the exposition is attended with the same difficulties. *Fourthly*,—If it mean, as others aver, the *power of God putting itself forth*, i. e. in the creation, it is liable to the same objections. In short, make it any *attribute* of God thus personified, and you introduce a mode of writing that the New Testament nowhere else displays, and which even the Old Testament exhibits but once, (Prov. viii.) in a poetic composition of the most animated and exalted nature.

Yet this is not the chief difficulty. To what class of men could John address the asseveration, that the *Logos* (*wisdom*, *word*, or *power* of God) “was with God?”

Where did these singular heretics suppose the *power* of God was, except *with him*? Or where his *wisdom* or his *word*? A peculiar pertinacity, too, in their strange opinion they must have had, to have rendered it necessary for the apostle to repeat with emphasis, in the second verse, that this *Logos was with God*. What would be said of a man who should gravely assert, that “the *power* of Peter is with Peter, or that his *wisdom* or his *word* is so?” And suppose he should add, “the *power* or *wisdom* of Peter is Peter,” with

what class of mystics should we rank him? Yet John adds, "*The Logos was God.*" Until, then, some heretics of the apostolic age can be discovered who maintained that the attributes of God were not *with* him, I cannot explain how the apostle could assert twice successively, and of course emphatically, that his attributes were *with* him.

Equally difficult is it for me to divine how he could say that any attribute (*power* or *wisdom*) *was God*—understanding the word *God* in any sense which you please. If it mean *Supreme God*, then it reduces itself to this—either that one attribute is the supreme God, or that there are as many Gods as attributes. If it mean an *inferior* God, then the *wisdom* of God being an *inferior* God, implies that his other attributes are *superior* Gods; or else that his wisdom holds the place of *quasi* God, while his other attributes occupy a lower place. Suppose that it should be said that *Logos* or *wisdom* denotes the essence of God, then how could it be called Θεός, which implies an agent or person—a *concrete*, as logicians say, and not an *abstract*? The divine substance or essence is called Θειοτης or το Θειον, not ὁ Θεός. What could be meant, moreover, by the *essence* of God becoming incarnate?

If, however, it should be said, that to suppose the existence of a sect of heretics, who held that the attributes of God were *not with him*, is unnecessary in order to justify the apostle for having written the first verse of his gospel, and that we

may regard this verse as written simply for general instruction, then I would ask, whether it is probable that a revelation from heaven is made to inform us that the *attributes of a being are with that being?* or what can be thought of the assertion, that the *wisdom or power* of God is God himself?

Let us proceed now to the second clause, "*and the Logos was with God,*"—*i. e.*, as all agree, with God the Father. Compare verses 14 and 18; also chapter xvii. 5, and 1 John i. 1, 2; which make the point clear. Is this expression capable of any tolerable interpretation, without supposing that the *Logos*, who was *with God*, was in some respect or other different, or *diverse from that God with whom he was?* This *Logos* was the same that became incarnate, (verse 14) that made the most perfect revelation of the will and character of God to men, (verse 18) and was called *Christ*. He was therefore, *in some respect*, diverse from the Father, and therefore by no means to be confounded with him.

"*And the Logos was God.*" It has been proposed (in Impr. Vers. of N. Test.) to render the word  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ , a *god*. Does then the Christian Revelation admit of gods superior and inferior? And if so, to what class of inferior gods does the *Logos* belong? And how much would such a theory of divine natures differ from that which admits a Jupiter Optimus Maximus and gods greater and less?

But it is said, that " $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  is destitute of the

article, and therefore cannot designate the Divine Being, who is supreme." This observation, however, is far from being justifiable, either by the usage of the sacred writers or the principles of Greek syntax. Among instances where the Supreme God is certainly designated, and yet the article is omitted, the inquirer may consult the very chapter in question, ver. 6, 13, 18; also Matt. xix. 26; Luke xvi. 13; John ix. 33; xvi. 30; Rom. viii. 8; 1 Cor. i. 3; Gal. i. 1; Ephes. ii. 8; Heb. ix. 14. Besides, every reader of Greek knows, that where the subject of a proposition (which in this case is *ὁ λογος*) has the article, the predicate (*Θεος*) omits it. Such is Greek usage; and from it dissent only propositions of a reciprocating or controvertible nature,—as in verse 4, of the chapter in question. It may be added, too, that if the writer had said, *καὶ ὁ λογος ἦν ὁ Θεος*, it would have conveyed a very different sense from the proposition as it now stands. He would then have said, *the Logos is the God with whom he is*; whereas I understand *Θεος* here to mean *divine nature*, simply but not abstractly considered, for which it so often stands in other places. Vide Mark viii. 33: x. 27: xii. 24; Luke iii. 8: xi. 20: xviii. 4, 19; John i. 13: iii. 2: iv. 24: x. 33; Acts v. 29: vii. 55: x. 33: xi. 18, &c.

I readily acknowledge, that *affirmative* evidence of the somewhat diverse meaning of *Θεος*, here, cannot be drawn from the word itself, but must be deduced from the circumstances of the affirmation, united with the supposition that John did assert,



and did mean to assert, something that is intelligible. There is indeed no very serious difficulty in taking Θεός (*God*) in the same sense in both clauses, provided we understand it to denote the Divinity. To interpret the verse thus would represent John as saying, that while Christ was God or truly divine, there was at the same time a sense in which he was *with* God. In order that this should have any possible meaning, a distinction in the Godhead must be admitted,—viz. that the Father is not in all respects the same as the Son.

For myself, I do not hesitate to understand the word *God* in a sense somewhat diverse, in the two clauses of the verse under consideration. Every word takes a sense adapted to its connexion. Such is the rule which must be adopted, after we have once conceded that a writer uses words with propriety, and designs to be understood. So, when our Saviour says, “Let the dead bury their dead,” the connexion requires us to explain it thus,—“Let those who are morally or spiritually dead, bury those who are corporeally so.” It were easy to accumulate examples, where the very same word, in the very same verse, has two different shades of sense. The exigency of the passage (*exigentia loci*) is the rule of interpretation which guides us here: and, guided by this exigency, what difficulty is there in supposing that God, as Father, is meant in the first instance, and the Divinity, without reference to the peculiar distinction of *Father*, in the second?

I understand John, then, as affirming, that the *Logos* was God, and yet was with God,—viz. that he was truly divine, but still divine in such a manner that there did exist a distinction between him and the Father. I take the word *God*, in one case, to mean, as in a great number of cases it does mean, God as Father; in the other case, I regard it as a description of divine being of the Divinity, without reference to the distinction of Father,—a use which is very common.

Least of all have those a right to object to this, who here make the meaning of *God*, in the second instance, to be infinitely different from its meaning in the first instance,—understanding by the first, the self-existent, independent, and infinite God; by the second, a created or derived and finite being.

If you ask now, What could be the object of John, in asserting that *the Logos was with God*? I answer, that the phrase, *to be with one* (εἶναι πρὸς τινά) indicates *conjunction, communion, familiarity, society*.—See Mark ix. 19. Compare too, John i. 18, where the only-begotten Son is said to be “in the bosom (εἰς τὸν κόλπον) of the Father,” which is a phrase of similar import.

To illustrate the meaning of the phrase, *to be with God*, it is useful also to compare those cases where Christians are promised, as the summit of their felicity, that they shall *be with God* and Christ, and be where they are. See among other passages, John xiv. 2, 3; xii. 26; xvii. 24; 1 Thess. iv. 17. Compare Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12; Coloss. iii. 1—4.

In John xvii. 5, Christ speaks of that “glory which he had *with the Father* before the world was.” From all these passages taken together, it would seem that the phrase, *the Logos was with God*, amounts to asserting that he was (*conjunctissimus Deo*) *most intimately connected with him*. If you ask me *how*, I answer freely that I cannot tell. The Evangelist has asserted the *fact*, but has not added one word to explain the (*modus*) manner. If I could explain it, then perhaps I might define the distinction which I believe to exist in the Godhead.

But why should John assert such a connexion? In opposition, I answer, to those in early times who asserted that Christ was a being not only *distinct from God*, but *an emanation from him*. The asseveration, that the *Logos was with God*—was from the beginning most intimately *connected with him*, and was *divine*—would of course contradict such an opinion.

✓ But does the Evangelist here mean to assert of the *Logos*, that he is God in the true and supreme sense, or not? This is the fundamental question between us. Analogy, drawn from the New Testament usage of the word ΘΕΟΣ (which nowhere else employs this word simply and singly, except to designate the Supreme God) must be admitted strongly to favour the idea, that Christ is here asserted to be truly divine. I readily allow that, in the Old Testament, the word *God* has various applications—that it is applied (though only in the plural number) to magistrates—that it is used

to designate those who, for a time, stand as it were in the place of God, as Moses was to be for a *god* to Pharaoh, (Exod. vii. 1,) and instead of God to Aaron, (Exod. iv. 16.) But it is not possible, in any instances of this nature, to mistake the meaning. The adjuncts or context always guard effectually against mistake. Men or inferior beings are never called *God*, or gods *simply*. We read of a “god to Pharaoh;” we read also, “I have said ye are gods, *but ye shall die like men.*” The Scriptures speak of the god of Ekron, the god of the Ammonites, the gods of the heathen, &c. Is a mistake possible here? But the *Logos* is called *God simply*. Nor is this all. Admitting that the name of itself determines nothing, (and, for sake of the argument, I am willing to admit it,) yet the writer has added explanations of his meaning, which seem to place what he intended to assert, by the expression in question, beyond the reach of fair debate.

John i. 3: “All things were [made] by him; and without him was nothing [made] which was [made.]” Verse 10. “The world was [made] by him.”

I have excluded the word *made*, by placing it in brackets, merely to show that the sense is in nowise changed by the version of those critics, who tell us that *εγενετο* never means *made*, but simply *was*. Yet nothing can be farther from correctness than such an assertion. Accordingly, *ποιεω* and *γινομαι* are used as synonymes;—as in James iii. 9: compare Gen. i. 26, in the Septuagint; Gen. ii. 4; Isaiah xlvi. 7. The cases

where *γινομαι* means to *make* or *produce*, are so numerous and obvious, that a moment's delay in respect to this part of the subject would be useless. Schleusner's Lexicon, under the word *γινομαι*, will furnish adequate proof of this. If not, read the commentary of Theodoret on the first two chapters of Genesis, which places the question, as to the use of *γινομαι*, beyond debate.

But what are the "all things"—the *universe* (*τα παντα*)—which the *Logos* made or created?—"The moral world—the Christian church," answers Faustus Socinus. To this exposition, however, there are two objections. *First*, a part of these *τα παντα* are, in verse 10, represented as (*ὁ κοσμος*) *the world*,—a term nowhere in the New Testament applied to the Christian church, nor to men as morally amended by the gospel. *Secondly*, this very *world* (*ὁ κοσμος*), which he created, *did not know or acknowledge him*, *αυτον ουκ εγνω*. Whereas the distinguishing trait of Christians is, that they *know Christ*—that they *know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent*.

*Τα παντα*, then, which the *Logos* created, means (as common usage and the exigency of the passage require,) *the universe*—the worlds material and immaterial. (Ver. 10.) Here, consequently, in the first chapter of John, is a passage in which, beyond all reasonable doubt, Christ is called *God*; and where the context, instead of furnishing us with reasons for understanding the word *God* in an inferior sense, (as is usual when this designation is applied to inferior beings,) has plainly and unequivocally

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cally taught us, that this *God* (Θεός), who was the *Logos*, created the universe. The question, then, is reduced to this simple state—Is he, who created the universe, truly and properly divine? On this question I shall make a few remarks, when I have considered some other passages which ascribe the work of creation to Christ.

Heb. i. 10—12: “And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

These words are spoken of the *Son of God*; for they are intimately connected by the conjunction *and* with ver. 8, where it is written, “But unto the *Son* he saith,” &c. According to the laws of grammar, and most clearly according to the nature and design of the apostle’s argument, the ellipsis to be supplied, in the beginning of the tenth verse, after *and* (καί) is, “And [*to the Son he saith*], Thou, Lord,” &c. No other exposition can be pointed out, which doth not make a violent divulsion of the passage from the connexion of the writer’s argument.

The question still remains, “What is meant by *founding the earth*, and by the heavens being the work of Christ’s hands?” To answer the first question, and place the answer beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt, it is necessary only to compare the passages in which Jehovah is said

to have *founded the earth*. By this phrase, the *creation* of it is indubitably meant. The passages may be found in Ps. xxiv. 2: lxxxix. 11: civ. 5: cxix. 90; Job xxxviii. 4; Prov. iii. 19; Is. xlviii. 13: li. 13; Zech. xii. 1; where, if you inspect the Septuagint, you will see the very verb *θεμελιω* (to found, to establish) employed, which the apostle uses in our text.

In regard to the “heavens being the works of Christ’s hands,” it is an expression plainly of similar import to the one just examined, and signifies the *creation* of the heavens. Thus, (Ps. viii. 3, 6)—“When I consider the heavens, *the work of thy hands;*” which is parallel with “The moon and stars which thou hast ordained,” (Septuagint *εθεμελιωσας*). So, in verse 6th, “And hast placed him over *the works of thy hands;* all things hast thou put under his feet,”—*i. e.* placed him over the *creation*.

To prove that the phrase to *create the heavens and the earth*, means to create *all things*, it is necessary only to consult Gen. i. 1; Ex. xx. 11: xxxi. 17; Neh. ix. 6; Ps. cxxi. 2: cxxiv. 8, cxxxiv. 3, and other like passages which a concordance will supply.

It will be remembered, that the passage in question (Heb. i. 10—12) is a quotation from the Old Testament; and that to quote the language of the Old Testament, therefore, in order to explain it, is peculiarly appropriate and necessary.

Would any one, now, unembarrassed by peculiarity of system, ever suspect that Christ’s *found-*

*ing the earth, and the heavens being the works of his hands*, could mean anything less than the creation of the universe? Yet we have been told by some distinguished Unitarians, that the *heavens* mean the Christian state or dispensation, and earth the *Jewish* one.

But *first*, this is against usage, either in the Old or New Testament,—there being nothing to support such a sense of it. Isaiah indeed speaks of *creating a new heaven and a new earth* (lxv. 17); and of *planting the heavens and the earth* (li. 16) in a moral sense, *i.e.* making a moral change or creation. But then the language itself, in the first case, indicates that the *old* creation is NOT meant; and, in the second case, the context makes it as clear what kind of heaven and earth is to be planted or established, and what the planting of them means,—viz. the Jewish church and state is to be renewed and established. The meaning, then, assigned by some Unitarians to the passage in Heb. i., is against the plain and perpetual usage of the Scriptures, in regard to such expressions, when they occur in an *unlimited form*, as they do in the passage under examination.

*Secondly*,—If the Jewish and the Christian states are here meant, in what sense are they to wax old as a garment and to be changed? Of the Jewish state this might without much difficulty be affirmed. But how the Christian dispensation is to be changed—how that “kingdom which *shall have no end*” (Luke i. 33) is to “perish,” I am unable to explain.

“It is a moral creation, of which Christ is the author,” says Artemonius, *i.e.* Crellius, (Init.Evang. Johan.) This, however, does not explain the matter; for how is it that the *moral creation* of Christ is to be *changed* and perish, *i.e.* to be annihilated? Most obviously his moral creation is to be eternal.

Another method of explaining this subject has been, to aver that the passage here quoted by the apostle from Ps. cii. 25—27, is, in the original, plainly applicable to Jehovah only; and that none would conjecture, from the simple perusal of this Psalm, how Christ could be the subject of it. Conceding that the passage is applicable to Jehovah only (and it would be difficult to show why this is not to be conceded), what is the consequence?—Either that the apostle has directly, and without qualification, applied to Christ language used by an inspired writer of the Old Testament to designate the creator of the world, with his eternal and immutable nature; or that he has (in a way singular indeed for a man of piety and honesty) accommodated language descriptive of the infinite Jehovah only, to a created and dependent being. *Κυριος* (*Lord*) in the Greek, corresponds to the word *Jehovah* in the original Hebrew,—the Septuagint having commonly rendered it in this manner. And though *Jehovah* is not in the Hebrew text (Ps. cii. 25), yet it is evident, from the preceding context, that it must be understood there as the subject of the verb, *thou hast founded*. Christ, then, is here called by the apostle *Jehovah*; and *eternity, immutability,*

and the creation of the universe, are ascribed to him.\*

I cannot think that the paraphrase of Grotius, on the passage in question, deserves a serious refutation. "Thou wast the cause," says he, "that the earth was founded: and on thy account the heavens were made." If this be not a different thing from what the language of the apostle naturally means, or can mean, I confess I know not any bounds which may be set to paraphrastic or mystical exegesis. Suppose now the Gnostics, who maintained that evil demons, and not Jehovah, created the world, should have paraphrased the first verse in Genesis in this manner,—“Thou, Jehovah, wast the cause why the heavens and the earth were created;” and when asked how this could consist with their sentiments, or what they could mean by it, they should have replied, “Out of enmity to thee the evil demons brought the material creation into existence;” then they would have explained away the creative act of Jehovah, exactly as Grotius explains away the evidence that Christ was the Creator.

Col. i. 15—17: “Who is the image of the in-

\* I readily admit, that *κύριος* is not always synonymous with *Jehovah*: but where the word *Jehovah* is used in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, *κύριος* stands, in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, as the translation of it. Therefore *κύριος* in the New Testament must of course, in such cases, have the same meaning as *Jehovah* in the Old Testament. The reason why *κύριος* is used by the New Testament writers as the translation of *Jehovah* in the Hebrew Scriptures, is, that the Jews, in reading their sacred writings, were not accustomed to pronounce the word *Jehovah*, but read, for the most part, *Lord*, *κύριος*, in the room of it.



visible God, the head of all creation ; for by him were all things created, both celestial and terrestrial, visible and invisible, of whatever order or rank they are—all things were created by him and for him. Therefore he was before all things, and by him are all things sustained."

The places in which I have departed from our common version, are not differently rendered in order to make them favour the cause which I have espoused ; for they determine nothing respecting the point now at issue. They are rendered as above, merely to make the meaning of the passage in general as plain as the nature of the case will permit.

Because, in verse 20, Christ is said "to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλαζαι) all things unto himself," and these are said to be "things in heaven and things on earth;" and afterwards he is represented as breaking down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, some ingenious commentators have supposed that "things in heaven and things on earth" mean *Jews and Gentiles*. How very unnatural this explanation is, no one can help feeling who reads the passage in an unbiassed manner. In what tolerable sense can the Jews and Gentiles be called "things visible and invisible?" or how shall we explain the phrase, "things in heaven and things on earth," as applied to them? By "reconciling things in heaven and things on earth," seems evidently to be meant, bringing into union, under one great head, *i. e.* Christ, by a new and special bond of intercommunication, both angels

and men. In like manner, the two great parties on earth, Jews and Gentiles, are united together. But why Christ should be called "the image of the invisible God," and the "head (*πρωτοτοκος* *the first born*) of all creation," because he is merely the instrument of bringing Jews and Gentiles together, is not apparent to me. Yet, to be such an instrument, is all that the passage in question ascribes to him, if we are to construe it in the manner above related. But when you understand the words of the apostle as describing the creation of the worlds celestial and terrestrial (*οἱ ουρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ*, compare Heb. i. 10—12,) and ascribing it to Christ, then you find sufficient reason for designating him by the exalted appellations in question.

It has also been affirmed that a *moral creation* only is here ascribed to Christ. But words like these, in such a connexion, and with such adjuncts, are nowhere else used in this sense. Moreover, in what sense has the *moral creation* by Christ affected the angels? The good ones needed not repentance or pardon; the bad ones have never sought or obtained either. "Verily, he did not assist the angels (*οὐ γὰρ ἔηπον ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι*,) but the seed of Abraham." (Heb. ii. 16.)

Until I see different light, therefore, shed over the passage in question, I must regard it as very clearly ascribing the creation of the universe to Christ.

But you will say, perhaps, that in John i. 3, "All things are said to be made *by Christ*," *δια Χριστου*, as the *instrumental*, not the *principal*

cause,—the preposition *δια* denoting such cause. In Col. i. 16, it is also said that all things were created *by Christ* (*δι' αὐτοῦ*); and in Heb. i. 2, God is said to have created the worlds *by* his Son,—*Δι' οὗ* (sc. *υἱοῦ*) *καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας ἐποίησεν*.

The allegation, however, that *δια* does not designate the *principal* as well as the *instrumental* cause, can by no means be supported. In Rom. xi. 36, “All things are said to be of God (*ἐξ αὐτοῦ*), and by God (*δι' αὐτοῦ*), the very form of expression applied to Christ in Coloss. i. 16—20. So Heb. ii. 10, “For it became him (God the Father), for whom, *δι' ὃν*, are all things, and by whom, *δι' οὗ*, are all things,” &c. 1 Cor. i. 9: “God is faithful, by whom *δι' οὗ*, ye were called into the fellowship of his Son,” &c. Moreover, *ἐκ* and *δια* are sometimes interchanged as equivalents or synonymes. See Rom. iii. 30. So also *ἐν* and *δια* Coloss. i. 16,—*τα πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη*, and *δι' αὐτοῦ ἐκτίσται*,—*ἰ. ε.* *ἐν* and *δια*, in these two phrases, are of the same import. See Schleusner's Lex. in voc. *δια*.

The difficulty remaining is to explain the phrase “by whom *δι' οὗ* he (the Father) made the worlds;” (Heb. i. 2.) The apostle has added sufficient in verses 10—12, as it might seem, to prevent mistake here. If, however, the difficulty seems still to press, it may be compared with Hosea i. 7, “I (Jehovah) will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them *by Jehovah*.” Is the second Jehovah merely the *instrumental* cause in this case? Of the same nature is the phra-

seology in Gen. xix. 24: “And *Jehovah* rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha fire and brimstone FROM JEHOVAH out of heaven.” Must the *last Jehovah*, in this case, be a being inferior to the *first*? If not, then the phrase that *God made the worlds by his Son*, does not imply, of course, that the Son is of an inferior nature. It does imply that there is a distinction between the Father and Son; and this is what we aver to be a Scripture doctrine. It seems to declare also, that *the Godhead, in respect to the distinction of Son, was in a special manner concerned with the creation of the worlds*. What is there impossible or improbable in this?

From the passages of Scripture thus far considered, it appears plain that the apostles have ascribed the creation of the universe to Christ. And now we come, in order, to the consideration of the simple question, whether he who created the world is really and truly divine.

First, then, permit me to ask, If the act of creation does not prove the being who performs it to be omniscient, omnipotent, and independent, is it possible for me to conceive of any thing which does or can prove the existence of such a being? To bring this world into existence from nothing—to establish such perfect concord and design through all the operations of nature—to set in motion unnumbered worlds and systems of worlds, and all in the most perfect harmony and order—requires more intelligence, more power, and more wisdom, than ever belonged to any finite being.

And if these things do not characterise the infinite Being, it seems to me no proof that such a being exists can be adduced.

It is in vain to tell me here that the creation of the universe can be performed by *delegation*—by an inferior and subordinate being. What can be meant by omnipotence and infinite wisdom (all of which must belong to a Creator) being *delegated*? Can God *delegate* his *perfections*? If so, then the Gnostics, when pressed with the argument that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, was the Supreme God, because he created the heavens and the earth, might have replied, that he did this only by *delegated power*; and that the act of creation, therefore, proves nothing. You reply to such an allegation, that the act of creating the universe is one which no finite or secondary being can perform? If this act do not designate the absolute, supreme, omnipotent, and omniscient Being, then no proof that such a being exists can possibly be adduced.

We use the very same arguments to confute those who maintain that Christ created the world by *delegated power*. The apostle having decided the question that Christ did create the world, has decided, consequently, that he must be *truly divine*.

✓ Agreeably to this reasoning, the Bible every-  
✓ where appeals to *creative power* as the peculiar and distinguishing prerogative of the Supreme God; and attributes it solely to Jehovah. Read Gen. ii. 2, 3; Ex. xx. 11; Is. xlv. 24; Jer. x. 12;



Ps. viii. 3, 4: cii. 25, and other passages of the same tenor. Read Isa. xl. and onward, where God, by his prophet, makes a most solemn challenge to all polytheists to bring the objects of their worship into competition with him, and declares himself to be distinguished from them all by his being "the Creator of the ends of the earth" (ver. 28), and by his having formed and arranged the heavens (ver. 26).

Can it be made plainer than these passages make it, that *creative power* was regarded by the Hebrew Prophets as the *appropriate* and *peculiar* attribute of the Supreme God? Need I say, that the Old Testament is filled with passages which ascribe the work of creation to Jehovah alone? Who does not find them everywhere intermixed, in the most delightful and affecting manner, with all the instructions of the sacred Hebrew writers?

Now, if a subordinate agent, a *finite spirit*, did create the universe, why should all the instructions of the Old Testament be so framed as inevitably to lead the Jewish nation to disbelieve and reject this fact? Specially so as the Jews were strongly inclined to polytheism, and a plurality of gods would have been very agreeable to their wishes. And why, after a lapse of so many centuries, should the writers of the New Testament overturn all that the Hebrew Scriptures had taught on this subject, and lead men to admit that a *finite being* could and did create the world? Most of all, how could Paul say (Rom. i. 20) that the heathen were without excuse for not acknowledging the

*eternal power and Godhead* of the Divinity, from the evidence which his *CREATING* power afforded—from considering the *THINGS THAT WERE MADE*?

And is this truth—that the Deity possesses eternal power and Godhead—so plain, then, and so easily deduced from *CREATING ENERGY*, that the very heathen are destitute of all excuse for not seeing and admitting it; and yet, can it be the object of Christianity to bring us back to the very polytheism for which the apostle condemned them—to bring us to “worship the *creature* more than the *CREATOR*?” Does Christianity contradict a truth of natural religion so plain and incontrovertible, that the very heathen were without excuse for not acknowledging it? And, after reading such a passage in the writings of Paul, can it be possible to suppose that he ascribed the creation of the world to any thing but the true God only? Compare now Acts xvii. 23—26, with John i. 1—3, and 10; Heb. i. 10—12; Coloss. i. 14—17; and then say, is it possible to admit the rules of interpretation which you have laid down, and not admit that the apostles designed to assert that Christ is the Creator of the universe? And if he is so, is it possible to deny that he is *truly divine*?

It were easy to produce passages of the New Testament, which ascribe the same works to Christ as to God (as John v. 17—23: xiv. 9, 11). But as the vindication of these would swell these Letters beyond their proper length, I shall not enter into a discussion of them at present. I am

not anxious to increase the number of witnesses; for, acknowledging the New Testament to be of divine authority, I consider whatever it plainly declares once, to be the truth. The *relevancy* and *plainness* of the testimony, therefore, is more the object of my solicitude, than the *number of* witnesses,—a point, I may add, in which many, who have defended our sentiments, have greatly erred.

I shall proceed, therefore, to other texts of Scripture, in which Christ is declared to be God.

Rom. ix. 5: “Whose are the fathers; and from whom, in respect to the flesh (his human nature,) Christ (descended), who is the Supreme God, blessed for ever. Amen!”

In regard to this text, it may be remarked, *first*, that although Griesbach has filled his margin with conjectural and other readings, he attributes no considerable weight to any of them; for *all the manuscripts* of the Epistle to the Romans, which have been collated, *contain the text as it stands*; as do *all the ancient versions*, and *nearly all the fathers*.

In rendering το κατὰ σάρκα, *in respect to his human nature*, I feel supported by corresponding passages, in Rom. i. 3;\* Acts ii. 30. And that ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ παντῶν Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, is literally translated, *who is Supreme God, blessed for ever*, may be shown in various ways. Ὁ ὢν is here put, as in common (see John i. 18: iii. 13; 2 Cor. xi. 31,) for ὅς ἐστι, *who is*. The ground of this lies

\* As it stands in the Textus Receptus.

simply in the nature of Greek usage. Whenever  $\acute{o}$  is used for  $\acute{o}\varsigma$ , it takes the participle  $\omega\nu$  instead of the verb  $\epsilon\sigma\tau\iota$ . The Greeks say  $\acute{o}\ \omega\nu$ , but  $\acute{o}\varsigma\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\iota$ .

$\text{Ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός}$  is literally, “*over all God*,” i.e. Supreme God. Compare with the phraseology here, the word  $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha$  (*all*) as used in a connexion which respects Christ, in Col. i. 17; Eph. i. 19, 23; John iii. 31; and 1 Cor. xv. 27. It is used in such passages as a term of qualification which serves to describe him as the *head* or *ruler* of the universe. What, then, can  $\text{Ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός}$  mean, but *Supreme God*?

But on no text has greater pains been bestowed, in order to devise an unusual construction and meaning. Schlichting proposed to transpose  $\acute{o}\ \omega\nu$ , and read  $\omega\nu\ \acute{o}$ , i.e. *of whom* (the Jewish fathers) *is God, blessed for ever*. But as, in this very Epistle, the apostle has laboured to prove that God is as well the God of the Gentiles as the Jews (ch. iii. 29), this expedient would seem to impeach the apostle’s consistency, as well as violate the text. Nor would the text itself, as amended by Schlichting’s conjecture, be in any measure accordant with the idiom of the Greek language. If  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  has the article (and his transposition makes it  $\acute{o}\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ,) then  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$  must of necessity have it too,—inasmuch as an adjective following a noun with an article, and agreeing with it, of necessity takes the article.

Wetstein’s conjecture, that it should be read  $\acute{o}\ \omega\nu\ \acute{o}\ \text{Ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός}$ , is not more fortunate. Such a mode of expression as  $\acute{o}\ \omega\nu\ \acute{o}$ , all relating to the

same subject, is repugnant to Greek usage. Besides, this conjecture, like that of Schlichting, not only violates the integrity of the text, but assigns the article to θεος, and omits it before εὐλογητος, which is surely inadmissible.

Enough of amending the apostle's words by conjecture, without the authority of a single manuscript or version. Critical acumen has also employed itself in dividing and translating the verse in question, in a manner different from that in our common Testament. The late Professor Justi, at Marburg, a man of great acuteness and fine taste, undertook to defend the ingenious supposition, that the latter part of the verse is a doxology. He renders it, "Whose ancestors were those [renowned] fathers from whom the Messiah, as to his mortal body, was derived, who is exalted over all [the fathers], God be blessed for ever!" Thus, by the aid of supplying an idea not contained in the text, and by doing violence to the custom of language, in the doxological part, he has devised a method in which we may avoid the assertion, that Christ is *God over all*, or *Supreme God*. But who does not perceive the violence and inaptitude of the divulsion which he makes, by separating the former from the latter part of the verse? Besides, how would a doxology fit the passage in question? Crellius (Init. Evang. Johan. p. 230, 237,) long ago was candid enough to own, that when the apostle was affected with the greatest sadness, on account of the unbelief of his Jewish brethren, and the loss of their privileges, a *doxo-*



logy was not very congruous. A prayer (as in ch. x. 1,) would seem, as he thinks, to be much more appropriate.

Omitting, however, all this, it may be added, that Greek usage by no possibility admits of the doxological version of Justi. *Θεος ευλογητος* means, *God who is blessed*, i. e. the proposition in such a case is assumed, not asserted. But *ευλογητος ὁ Θεος* means, *God be blessed; let God be blessed or praised*. In accordance with this Greek usage, we find five instances of doxology in the New Testament, and about forty in the Old, in which *ευλογητος* is uniformly placed FIRST. The same order is observed in respect to *καταρατος* (cursed), when an imprecation is uttered.

Besides, the text must be changed to make out a doxology; and we must read *ὁ Θεος* instead of *Θεος*; for universal usage prescribes *ευλογητος ὁ Θεος*. (The instance Ps. lxvii. 19, Sept., brought by Stolz in his *Erläuterungen*, &c. to support Justi's rendering, depends merely on wrong punctuation, and the repetition of a word which does not correspond to the Hebrew text.)

Finally, if a doxology to the Father were intended here, it is scarcely possible to suppose that a particle of transition (*δε*, for instance) should not have been inserted, in order to give notice of so great a change. In any other case, we should expect to find it thus—*ὁ δε ων*; or if the doxology begin at *Θεος*, then *ευλογητος ὁ Θεος*. No text, no manuscript, no ancient version, gives us a trace of either of these readings. To invent them, there-

fore, and force them upon the text, or to substitute a conjecture, which originated from theological speculation, against the plain and incontrovertible evidence of the integrity of the text, what is it but to introduce a principle fundamentally subversive of all interpretation and criticism, and give up the Scriptures to be moulded to every man's own wishes?

All conjectures and theories, then, appear to be quite incompetent to explain away the common rendering of the verse, and the meaning connected with it. On the other hand, we may ask, How comes it that Christ, *according to his human nature* (το κατὰ σάρκα), is said to have descended from the fathers. What if I should affirm that David, as to his human nature, was descended from Jesse; would you not of course ask, what other nature had he except human? And such an inquiry, forced upon us by the expression in question, the apostle has immediately answered. As to his nature not human, he was "Supreme God, blessed for ever. Amen!" To have produced the human nature connected with such an exalted Being, the apostle reckons as one of the special privileges which the Jews had enjoyed. See and compare Rom. ix. 1—4.

I do not argue that Christ is divine, merely from having the appellation Θεός bestowed upon him. But if ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων Θεός be not *Supreme God*, and if the *antithesis* in this verse do not require us to understand a divine nature here, then I must despair of discovering the sentiment

of any text of Scripture, by using any of the rules of exegesis.

2

Heb. i. 8, 9: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

This passage is quoted from Ps. xlv. 6, 7. It has been objected, that  $\acute{o}$   $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  here should not be translated as the vocative, but nominative,—*e. g.* "God is thy throne for ever and ever, or thine everlasting throne or eternal support."

To this it may be replied,  $\acute{o}$   $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  is the *common* vocative of the *New Testament and Septuagint*. No objection to the usual rendering of this verse in the vocative case can be made from the *form* of the word, which is altogether common in Hellenistic Greek.\* The Attics use the same form of the noun, but they write it  $\acute{\omega}$   $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ , and not  $\acute{o}$   $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ . One needs only to open his Septuagint, in the Book of Psalms, or in almost any other part, to see incontrovertible evidence that  $\acute{o}$   $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  is the common vocative of the *Hellenistic* writers.

To the translation, "God is thy throne," *i. e.* thy support, several objections may be made.

1. Greek *usage* does not permit such a version. The subject and predicate cannot both have the

\* There were several dialects of the Greek language; the Attic, the Doric, &c. The Hellenistic Greek is a mixed dialect, which prevailed in the countries and periods in which the New Testament writers lived.

article, unless in the case of a convertible or reciprocal sentence; and surely it will not be urged that such is the present case. “*God is thy throne*,” would stand in Greek, *θρονος σου ὁ θεος*.\* For such a change in the text there is no respectable authority.

2. Such a translation would render insipid the argument of the apostle, in this chapter, to prove the preeminently exalted nature of Christ. To say of this illustrious personage, God is thy throne, *i. e.* thy support, might excite the persons to whom the epistle was addressed to ask, “And who is not supported by God? How is Christ entitled, on this account, to claim any *preeminence* in our regard?”

3. Such a translation contradicts the meaning of the word *throne*, understood either literally or figuratively. Literally, it is the *seat* on which kings sit. This sense is here out of the question. *Figuratively*, it stands for *dominion, empire, regal authority*; because it is one of the ensigns of such authority. But there is no such figurative sense to it as that of *support*. And what sense would it make to say, *God is thy dominion, thy regal authority*? If you reply, This may mean, God is the cause of thy *dominion* or *regal authority*, then I ask again, Of what king’s dominion and authority is not God the cause? Is it not the universal doctrine of the Bible, that “*by him*

\* See the latter clause of the verse, where *ἡ παβδος* is the subject, but *παβδος* the predicate, according to the laws of the language.

kings reign and princes decree justice?" And how then is Christ entitled to any *preeminence* because God is the cause of his dominion? Or what advances does the apostle make in his argument by such an assertion?

To the translation in question there is still another objection, which is drawn from the nature of Hebrew parallelism in poetry. The verse under discussion plainly is one in which the *subject* is the same in both parts, *i. e.* it is a synonymous parallelism. Now, the second member of this is, "the sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness;" in other words, *thy dominion is righteous*. The first member of the parallelism, consequently, is to be explained in a similar way, and evidently means, *thy dominion (throne) is everlasting*. What could be more tasteless or unmeaning here than to say, "God is thy throne," *i. e.* support, or cause of dominion—when the object of the writer is to show the *preeminent* dignity of the Son of God?

The proposed mode of rendering, then, violates Greek usage—frustrates the argument of the apostle—forces an unexampled meaning upon *θρονος*—and transgresses the laws of parallelism in the Hebrew original, from which the passage was taken.

I am aware of the objections which have been made to understanding the word *God*, in the passage now under consideration, in its highest sense. For, first,—It is said that the person called God (*Elohim*) here calls another being *his God*, and therefore he cannot be supreme.



To the *fact* I readily assent; but the *conclusion* drawn from it I must be permitted to doubt. If Christ be described in the forty-fifth Psalm (and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews asserts this to be the fact,) he is described as a king triumphant over his enemies. As the Messiah, the anointed king, he might, with the greatest propriety, call Jehovah his God—for as Messiah he is to be considered as incarnate—and of course subordinate. Is it still a matter of wonder, that the same person could at one time be called *God* and have everlasting dominion ascribed to him, who, the next moment, calls Jehovah *his God*? It is a wonder of the same nature as that which perplexed the Jews, when Christ asked them how David could call the Messiah *Lord*, while at the same time he was his Son. It is a wonder which no ground but that of Trinitarians can ever explain. I mean the ground, that the divine and human natures coexisted in Christ, and that in the same sentence he could with propriety speak of himself as human and divine. 'The sacred writers appear not to take the least pains to separate the two natures in any thing which they say of either. They every where speak of Christ (so it appears to me) as either human or divine, or both. They do not seem to apprehend any danger of mistake in regard to the subject, no more than we, when we say, Abraham is dead, or Abraham is alive, think it necessary to add, *as to his body* in one case, or *as to his soul* in the other.

This very negligence (if I may be allowed the

expression, saving every thing that would imply improper want of care) offers a powerful argument to me, I confess, to prove that the sacred writers regarded the human and divine natures as so intimately connected in Christ, that it was unnecessary and inexpedient to attempt a distinctive separation of them, on every occasion which brought to view the person or actions of Christ.

A second objection is urged, viz. that the king, who is the subject of the forty-fifth Psalm, not only calls God *his* God, but is said to be “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.” If Christ be truly divine, how, it is asked, can he have *fellows*, *i. e.* equals?

The answer to this has, in substance, already been given. Christ is introduced here as the incarnate Messiah. To the *office of king*, God “consecrated him with the oil of gladness,” *i. e.* placed him in a royal station; he has the “oil of gladness above his fellows,” or a rank above those who also hold a regal office.

It has been objected, thirdly, that the forty-fifth Psalm, from which our text was taken, does not belong to the Messiah, but to David or Solomon. But how is this proved? “The language,” it is said, “is such as to show that it is a mere epithalamium or nuptial ode on the marriage of one of these kings with a foreign princess.” I have no time to enter into a discussion of this topic here; but I am satisfied that the difficulties which press upon such a view of the forty-fifth Psalm are overwhelming. Whatever may be said,

moreover, to prove this, unless it be palpable demonstration, cannot weigh much in the minds of those who regard the authority of the writer that composed the Epistle to the Hebrews. He has told us that the passage in question is *addressed to the Son*.

Here, then, if our view be correct, is one instance more in which Christ is called God, with adjuncts which render it probable that the Supreme God is meant.

I should rank the texts which I have already produced as the leading ones to establish the divine nature of Christ. But there are others which should not be neglected, in an impartial examination of Scripture evidence, on the present topic.

1 John v. 20: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

There are two reasons here why (ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός) *the true God* may be referred to Christ. 1. The grammatical construction favours it: Christ is the immediate antecedent. I grant that pronouns sometimes relate to a more remote antecedent; but cases of this nature stand on the ground of necessity, not of common grammatical usage. What doubt can there be that John could, without scruple, call the Logos *the true God* (ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός,) whom he had before asserted to be *God*, and *to have created all things*?

But, secondly, my principal reason for referring

*the true God* (ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς) to Christ is the other adjunct which stands with it: "This is the true God—and the ETERNAL LIFE." How familiar is this language with John, as applied to Christ! "In him (*i. e.* Christ) was LIFE, this LIFE was the light of men—giving LIFE to the world—the bread of LIFE—my words are spirit and LIFE—I am the way, the truth, and the LIFE—the Logos of LIFE. This LIFE (Christ) was manifested, and we have *seen it*, and do testify to you and declare the ETERNAL LIFE, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us." (1 John i. 2.) Now, as I cannot find any instance in John's writings, in which the appellation of LIFE and *eternal* LIFE is bestowed upon the Father, to designate him as the author of spiritual and eternal life—and as this occurs so frequently in John's writings as applied to Christ—the laws of exegesis compel me here to accord in my exposition with the common laws of grammar, and to construe both ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς and ἡ ζωὴ αἰώνιος (or, as in some manuscripts more consonantly with Greek idiom, read ἡ ζωὴ ἡ αἰώνιος,) both of Christ. If the *true* God then be not really divine, who is?

John xx. 28: "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."

I have three reasons for adducing this text. 1. There is no satisfactory proof that it is an exclamation of surprise or astonishment. No phrase of this kind, by which the Jews were accustomed to express surprise or astonishment, has yet been produced; and there is no evidence

that such a phrase, with the sense alleged, belongs to this language. 2. The Evangelist tells us, that Thomas addressed himself to Jesus, *said to him*, εἶπεν αὐτῷ; he did not merely *exclaim*. 3. The commendation, which the Saviour immediately bestows upon Thomas, serves chiefly to defend the meaning that I attach to the verse. Christ commends him for having seen and believed. The evidence that he believed was contained in the expression under examination; for, before uttering this expression, he is represented as doubting. On the supposition, then, that the expression was a mere exclamation, what evidence was it to the mind of Jesus, or could it be to the minds of others, that he admitted the claims of the Saviour of men, to the character which was connected with this office? What more proof of real belief can be found in such an *exclamation*, if it be truly one, than we can find that men are Christians, when they repeat, as is very common on occasions of surprise or delight, the name of Christ, by way of exclamation? But if we admit that the words of Thomas were the proper evidence and expression of that belief, for which the Saviour commended him, (and I do not see how we can fairly avoid this,) then we must admit that he will commend us for believing that he is both *Lord and God*, Κύριός καὶ Θεός, unless we adopt the notable expedient of Schlichting, who avers that *Lord* is to be referred to *Christ*, and *God* to the *Father*; which latter, he thinks, Thomas spoke after some interval of time had elapsed.



I pass over several passages, where our common text applies the name of God to Christ; *e. g.* Acts xx. 28, and 1 Tim. iii. 16. In regard to this latter text, however, it appears to me a plain case, that the authorities which Griesbach himself has adduced, would fairly lead to a decision different from his own, respecting the genuineness of the reading, Θεός. I will not attempt to weigh them here; as I feel no desire to press into my service, witnesses of a character at all dubious. I admit the great desert of Griesbach, in his critical edition of the New Testament. I believe he was a man who would not willingly or consciously misrepresent either facts or arguments, for or against any reading. But the work which he undertook was too great to be accomplished by one person, or even by one whole generation of critics. Dr. Laurence, in his Essay upon the Classification of Manuscripts by Griesbach, has rendered it more than probable that Griesbach's account of facts is not unfrequently *very erroneous*, not through design, but from human infirmity; and that the principles by which he estimated the value of manuscripts, and of course the genuineness of particular readings, are fundamentally erroneous. And, since I am on this subject, I may take the liberty to state, what seems to be so little known among us, that Griesbach is not the only recent editor of a critical Testament, to which the great body of critics attach importance. The celebrated Matthäi, whom Middleton calls the best Greek scholar that ever edited a Greek Testament,

published at Riga (between A. D. 1782—1788) a critical Testament, of twelve volumes, which approaches much nearer to the *Textus Receptus*, than the edition of Griesbach, with whom he is at variance. Eichhorn (after giving a high character of this edition of Matthäi, and noticing that, in his maxims respecting the formation of the New Testament text, the editor differs very much from Griesbach and others) says, that “for a long time he had followed the middle path between the two parties.” *Bibliothek. Band ii. St. 2, s. 411.*

The whole system of classifying manuscripts, which lies at the very foundation of all Griesbach’s decisions in regard to the text, is rejected by Matthäi as worthless; and Dr. Laurence has, in the Essay above mentioned, made an attack upon the same classification, which renders questionable the principles of it; at least the application of those principles, as made by Griesbach.

Professor Knapp, of Halle, has also published a Greek Testament, the text of which is independent of Griesbach’s, although it approximates to it. The edition is esteemed for its punctuation, order of words, accentuation, and spirituation; and has great currency.

I acknowledge this is digression. But it may be useful to those who are in the habit of attributing so much weight to Griesbach’s decisions, to know that they are far from being uncontroverted by many of the best critics among his own countrymen. I know of no commentator of note who has made

Griesbach's text his basis, except Paulus ; and he has re-examined all his decisions.

To return, however, to our subject. We do not want, and feel no disposition to use, either of the texts, referred to above as proof texts, in the question before us.

There is another class of texts, which I have not hitherto mentioned, because the certainty of their meaning is commonly thought to be less capable of demonstration than that of others which I have produced. I refer to such texts as Eph. v. 5, "The kingdom of Christ and God ;" Titus ii. 13, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ ;" 2 Tim. iv. 1, "I adjure you before God, even Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and the dead at his appearance and kingdom ; 2 Pet. i. 1. . . . "of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The translation of these texts here proposed is altogether in conformity to the Greek idiom. Middleton (on the Article) thinks it absolutely *essential* to it: for, although proper names and abstract nouns, in such a connexion as Θεός and Χριστός here, may take the article before the first noun, and omit it before the second, and yet designate *different things and persons* ; yet if words which are *attributives* omit the article in such a case, they exhibit evidence that they are to be connected with a preceding noun, and are the predicates of it, and not significant of something separate ; *e. g.* in the first case, Eph. v. 5, "the kingdom of Christ and God," according to this rule, would mean, *of*

*Christ who is God*; in the second instance, Tit. ii. 13, the meaning is, “of the great God, who is our Saviour,” &c.

Mr. Wordsworth, a few years since, instituted a most laborious investigation of the Greek fathers, to see whether the idiom which respects the article here was prevalent in their writings; and whether they ever understood more than *one person* to be designated by such expressions. The result I will give in his own words. (p. 132.)

“I have observed more, I am persuaded, than a thousand instances of the form, ὁ Χριστός καὶ ὁ Θεός (*Christ and God*) (Eph. v. 5); some hundreds of instances of ὁ μέγας Θεός καὶ σωτήρ (*the great God and Saviour*) (Tit. ii. 13); and not fewer than several thousands of the form ὁ Θεός καὶ σωτήρ (*God and Saviour*) (2 Pet. i. 1); while in no single case have I seen, where the sense could be determined, any one of them used, *but only of one person*.”

After all, if there were no other evidence of the divinity of Christ in the New Testament than what depends solely on these texts, one might perhaps hesitate concerning the subject. But when I consider that the method of translating here proposed, is perfectly conformable to the Greek idiom, and must be adopted in various other passages, (*e.g.* Rom. xv. 6; Eph. v. 20; James i. 27)—and if adopted in these, will give them a sense conformable to that of other parts of the sacred volume—I confess the evidence which these passages afford, if not decisive, at least confirms in no small degree the testimony of other texts;—specially in this case,

in regard to the text in Titus; for where is the *appearing* of God the Father ever spoken of by the New Testament writers? It is *Christ* who *appeared* to execute vengeance upon the Jewish nation,—who will *appear* at the judgment. Yet here the *appearance of the great God* is mentioned—of the *great God and Saviour*; for so I cannot but believe the text is fairly to be construed. Can this *great God* be any other than Christ himself?

Thus much for the texts which bestow on Christ the appellation of God, adjuncts that show in what sense the word *God* must be understood, according to the common rules of interpreting language. I must now,

II. *Examine another class, which attribute to Christ equality with God, or that power and dignity or honour which belong to God.*

I use the phrase *equality* with God, after the example of the apostle, in the text to be immediately examined. I know at the same time it is a phrase that leads, if any are so disposed, to logomachy. What I mean by it is explained by the words which immediately follow it.

Phil. ii. 5—8: “Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus; who, being in the condition of God, did not regard his equality with God as an object of solicitous desire, but humbled himself, (assumed an inferior or humbled station,) taking the condition of a servant, being made after the similitude of men, and being found in fashion



as a man, he exhibited his humility by obedience, even to the death of the cross."

Such is the rendering which, after laborious examination, I am persuaded the Greek of this passage not only admits, but demands. I will state my reasons for dissenting from the common method in which either Trinitarians or Unitarians have translated it.

Our common version runs thus: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but humbled himself," &c. This version seems to render nugatory, or at least irrelevant, a part of the apostle's reasoning in the passage. He is enforcing the principle of Christian humility upon the Philippians. In order to urge this in the most effectual manner, he proposes to them the example of Christ: "Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ." What was this?—It was manifested by the fact, that though essentially divine, (ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ) he did not eagerly retain his divine condition, but assumed the station or condition of a servant (μορφὴν δούλου). Here the relevancy of his reasoning is sufficiently plain. But how was it any proof or example of humility, that *he did not think it robbery to be equal with God?*

Besides, the Greek will not fairly bear this construction. Ἀρπαγμός, translated *robbery*, does not seem here to signify *an act of robbery*, but *res rapta*, or rather, figuratively, *res avide diripienda et vindicanda*,—i. e. something which is eagerly to be seized and appropriated. (See Schleusner and Storr, in locum.) Moreover, ἀρπαγμος, which our

translators have placed next to the verb ἡγήσατο, does not, by the rules of syntax, belong there. The Greek syntax would place the words thus, as to their sense: οὐκ ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ [κατὰ] ἀρπαγμὸν, literally, “he regarded not the being equal to God (as) ἀρπαγμὸν, as a thing to be greedily sought or appropriated.”

For these reasons, I cannot believe that our common version gives the sense of the passage. And, for similar reasons, I feel compelled to reject the version so common among some Unitarians,—“He did not think of the robbery of being equal with God.” The objections to it are, that it translates ἀρπαγμὸν here, as designating the *action of robbery*; and that οὐκ ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ ἀρπαγμὸν can never be proved to mean, “He thought not of the robbery of *being equal* with God.” The verb ἡγήσατο is not susceptible of such a meaning as *thought not of*,—i. e. *did not aspire to, imagine, form expectations of, &c.* In its primary sense, it signifies *to lead, to be pre-eminent, &c.*; in its secondary sense, *to esteem, judge, regard, repute, &c.* To render οὐκ ἡγήσατο ἀρπαγμὸν *he did not think of the robbery*, would therefore be violating the obvious principles of the Greek language. To justify in any measure such a version, the passage must run thus: οὐ ΤΟΝ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο ΤΟΥ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ. Even then, ἡγήσατο could not be rendered *thought not of*. The word does not permit this sense. And, as no ancient manuscript or version has given a hint of such a form of the text, it seems to be placed

beyond fair debate, that the translation now in question cannot be admitted.

Both our translators and Unitarians appear generally to have mistaken the import of the word *μορφή* (*condition, state*) in this passage. On the one hand, *μορφή* does not seem to me at all parallel with the *brightness* (*ἀπαύγασμα*) and *express image* (*χαρακτήρ*) which are applied to the Son in Heb. i. 3. These words designate the glory of the incarnate Messiah, who had appeared “in these last days,” and spoken to men. They express the same view of Christ which John gives (i. 14,) when he says, “We beheld his (Christ’s) glory,—verily the glory of the only-begotten of the Father; and this glory was seen after the ‘Word became flesh and dwelt among us.’” Comparison, then, of *μορφή Θεοῦ* with these passages, will not ascertain its meaning; for, to Christ belonged the *μορφή Θεοῦ* (*the condition of God*) before he humbled himself and took upon him the form of a servant. In occupying, indeed, the condition of a servant, (if I may so express the Greek *ἐκένωσε ἑαυτὸν*,) consisted his humiliation.

A fair examination of *μορφή*, either generally or in special relation to the passage before us, will end, as I must believe, in the conviction that the word is not unfrequently synonymous with *φύσις* (*nature*) and *οὐσία* (*being*.) The proofs which Schleusner has offered of this are sufficient. (Lex. in voc. *μορφή*.) But the proof of what it means in the passage before us, is too plain to be easily mistaken. If you say *μορφή Θεοῦ* means only a similitude or resemblance of God in *moral* qualities,

as we speak of Christians resembling God, then I ask whether his humiliation consisted in depressing, or subjecting to a lower state, the moral qualities which Christ possessed?

Does *μορφή Θεοῦ* mean, then, a resemblance to God in respect to *office*, as magistrates are called *gods*? But, on the supposition that Christ was only a *finite* being, what office did he lay aside in order to become incarnate? If Christ be only a created being, who were his subjects, and what was his dominion, before his mediatorial kingdom commenced by the event of his incarnation?

But this is not all. If *μορφή* mean only *similitude*, then what is the sense of the next clause, where Christ is said to have taken upon him the *μορφήν δούλου*? That he bore merely a *resemblance* to a servant,—*i. e.* to *one who obeys*, or is in an humble station; or that he did *actually* take the condition of one who was in an humble and depressed state, and persevere in it to the very death of the cross? The latter must be admitted, unless we hearken to the doctrine of the Docetæ, who taught that Christ was a man in *appearance* only, and not in reality. If *μορφή δούλου*, then, means the condition or state of one who is humbled or depressed, and subjected to the command of others, does not *μορφή Θεοῦ* mean the state or condition of one who is truly divine? \*

After all, it should be sacredly remembered, that on such a subject as this, human language (made up of terms formed to express the ideas of finite and mutable beings about finite and mutable ob-

*Forma = μορφή - embraces the idea of nature  
as well as the totality of attributes  
which form facies, figure &c. Hence the  
word μορφή has been translated in this sense*

jects) is of course incompetent fully to designate the mode of union between the divine and human natures. I must regard the language here, and in all other passages on this awful subject, as only an *approximation* toward describing what exists in the Divinity, or is done by him—he who was in the condition of God, and equal with God, *i. e.* divine, ἐκένωσε ἑαυτὸν, which means, as we translate it, “*exinanivit seipsum—made himself of no reputation.*” Yet, how incompetent must these translations be! So far as Christ is the immutable God, he cannot change — *i. e.* he cannot *divest himself* of his essential perfections. He cannot cease to be omnipotent, omniscient, &c. But he may veil the brightness of his glories for a time, by assuming to himself a union with the human nature, and making this the organ through which he displays his perfections during the time of the incarnation. Does the sun cease to shine—are his beams extinguished when an intervening cloud obscures for a while his lustre? Or is the sun in any measure changed?

In reply to a multitude of questions with which you and others can press Trinitarians on this subject, we may ask, Because God is omnipotent, does it follow that the whole of that omnipotence must be every moment exerted? If not (and who will refuse assent to this?) then why may he not have veiled his glories for a time in the incarnate Saviour, and still retain all his essential perfections unchanged? Is it too much to say that he may have done so? I believe that the text in question decides that he *did*.



I approach such a subject, however, with solemn awe; and never feel my own weakness and ignorance more intensely than while endeavouring to think upon it. The familiar, I had almost said irreverential manner, in which some speak and write respecting this mystery, is calculated, I freely acknowledge, to excite painful emotions. On the one hand, it would seem, if we are to credit one mode of representation, that the greatest portion of Christ's humiliation consisted in his having renounced and absolutely laid aside his divinity during the time of the incarnation; and that, *as God*, in this diminished condition, he did actually expire upon the cross. All the powers of language are exhausted in order to show how great must be the sufferings and condescension of Christ in undergoing such a degradation as this. On the other hand, some who revolt from these mistaken representations, verge to the other extreme. Lest they should degrade the divine nature of Christ, they are so careful to separate the human nature from it, that one is compelled to suppose that the man Jesus had simply a higher degree of inspiration and communion with God than other prophets. The New Testament does not seem to me to justify either of these extremes.

A thousand questions may be raised here—a thousand difficulties suggested, which no reflecting man will undertake to answer. The history of past ages exhibits an appalling picture of disputes about the person of Christ—all springing from the denial of *facts* revealed in the New

Testament, or from the unhallowed curiosity of men who desired to know what God has not revealed. The very last age witnessed a dispute in Germany between the theologians of Giessen and Tübingen, whether the humiliation (*κενωσις*) of Christ consisted "in abstinence from both the direct and reflex use of divine majesty," or in the "occultation of divine majesty;" a dispute which agitated the Lutheran church to the very centre.

The humble inquirer after truth, who once is brought clearly to see the boundaries of human knowledge, will shrink from disputations of such a nature, and pour forth his earnest supplications to God, that the simple verities which the Scriptures reveal may be believed on the authority of God; while the *manner* in which the facts revealed for our credence exist, is left with him "whose ways are unsearchable, and whose judgments are past finding out."

I have used the freedom of letter-writing in this discussion; I can hardly call it digression, as it is so nearly connected with the explanation of the text which I am examining. Will you now permit me to repeat, that the version which would correspond best with the real meaning of the passage in question, must express the following ideas: "Who, being of divine nature or condition, did not eagerly seek to retain his equality with God, but took on himself an humble condition," &c. In this way, and in this only, does the passage appear to be consistent with the apostle's argument and design, at least appropriate to them; and in

this way only can the Greek be fairly and grammatically rendered.

With the passage that has now been considered, seem to me to agree, in general import, several others: John v. 19,—“Whatsoever things he (the Father) doeth, the same doeth the Son likewise;” *i. e.* he has the same power as the Father. And when it is said in the context, “The Son doeth nothing by (or of, ἀπὸ—ἀφ’) himself, except he see the Father do it,” I understand the meaning to be, that the Jews had no reason to believe that Christ had any disposition to blaspheme God, (of which they had so frequently accused him,) for he acted in entire concert with the divine purposes and commands, and had no separate interests of his own.

John v. 21—23: “For as the Father raiseth the dead and restoreth them to life, so also the Son restoreth to life whom he pleases. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all men might honour the Son even as they honour the Father.”

Is there not here an equality of power and honour ascribed to the Father and Son? The Son is indeed introduced as “head over all things;” but could he be such a head, could “*all* judgment be committed to him,” if at the same time he was not also divine, and consequently omniscient? It is perfectly plain, that, in so far as the “committing of judgment to the Son” is concerned, it must be to the mediatorial person—to one who, in respect to office, is subordinate to God. But, in so far

as *qualifications* requisite to perform the duties which that *commitment* requires are concerned, the Saviour is divine; and the honour to be claimed by him is the same with that which the Divinity himself claims. It matters not whether you interpret this of obedience to be rendered to the Son, or of homage to be paid to him. Multitudes of prophets, as commissioned by God, have borne his messages of mercy and of judgment to his people; but to whom, among them all, did he grant the privilege of being honoured as himself? Or to what created being shall the glory of the blessed God be rendered, without infringing upon the fundamental principles of both the Jewish and the Christian religion?

In fact I cannot well conceive how our Saviour could have used the words above quoted, without having exposed himself to renewed and just accusations of the Jews for blaspheming, unless he were really divine. The Jews had accused him of violating the Sabbath, because he had on that day healed the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda. The reply of Christ to them was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" which, if I understand the argument, must mean, My Father has never ceased to work on the Sabbath in carrying on all the operations of the natural and moral world; he supersedes the law of the Sabbath. I have the same right. "The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath." The Jews then sought to slay him, because, as they affirmed, "he had violated the Sabbath, and said that God was his Father, *making himself equal with God.*" In reply to

their bitter accusations, Jesus made use of the language above cited,—telling them that he did whatever the Father did, and was entitled to the same honour. Was this relinquishing his claim to the equality with God which the Jews had charged him with assuming? Or was it speaking out plainly that he wrought on the Sabbath by the same right that the Father did, and was entitled to the same deference? Can his words, interpreted without regard to any preconceived theory, be made to signify less than this?

4 You will expect me, perhaps, to adduce John x. 30, “I and my Father are one.” It is a clear case that the Jews here seem to have understood Christ as claiming equality with God, or rather claiming to be God. (See verse 33.) But I am not satisfied that the manner in which they often expounded his words is a sure guide for our interpretation of them at the present time. The malignant disposition which they frequently displayed may well lead us to suspect that they would, if possible, put such a construction on his words as would subject him to the imputation of blasphemy or rebellion against the Roman government. I would expound the words of Christ, therefore, independently of any construction which his embittered enemies put upon them. And, in the present case, it seems to me that the meaning of “I and my Father are one,” is simply, “I and my Father are united in counsel, design, and power.”

So in John xvii. 20, 21, Christ prays that all who shall believe on him *may be one*. “As thou,



Father," continued he, " art in me, and I in thee ; so they also *may be one* in us,"—*i. e.* that the disciples may have the " same mind which was in Christ Jesus"—may copy after his example, and be united in the temper of their souls to him as he is to God—*may be one* with the Father and with him.

So also, in Gal. iii. 28, Christians of different ranks and nations are said to *be one* in Christ ; and 1 Cor. iii. 3, he that planteth and he that watereth *are one*,—*i. e.* they have the same affections and designs—they are united to accomplish the same object. In the same manner, Cicero says, "*Unus fiat e pluribus*," *many constitute one*, when persons are united in temper and pursuits. (De Offic. 1. i. c. 17.)

From the consideration of those texts which ascribe in a general sense equality with God, or divine power and honours, to Christ, let us now turn,

III. *To the examination of those which assert or imply that particular divine attributes, or works, belong to him.*

1. *Omniscience is ascribed to Christ.*

Matt. xi. 27 : All things are delivered unto me of my Father ; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

If in this passage the same *omniscience* be not

ascribed to the Son as to the Father, I am unable to make out satisfactorily what the meaning of it is. In the latter clause of the verse, men are declared to be entirely dependent on the Son for that knowledge of the Father which is revealed,—*i. e.* he only makes this revelation. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten, who dwelleth in the bosom of the Father, *he hath revealed him.*” (John i. 18.) At the same time, I concede, it is *possible*, that the knowledge here spoken of may be merely that which is intended to be revealed in the gospel.

John vi. 46: “Because that no man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.” The word *ἑώρακε* here, does not mean *to see with bodily eyes*, but *with the mental eye*,—*i. e.* to know. What but omniscience could be adequate to the knowledge here predicated of Christ? And is it a satisfactory explanation of the text, to say that the knowledge here meant is simply that which is conveyed in the instructions of the gospel?

In the same manner, the knowledge of the most intimate secrets of the human heart is ascribed to Christ. John ii. 24, 25: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men; and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.” John vi. 64: “But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.”

Acts i. 24: “And they prayed, and said, Thou

Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen." That *Lord* (Κύριος) here means *Christ*, seems to me very plain from verses 21 and 22 (compare verse 6) of the context. Besides, this is the *common* appellation of the Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles. The appeal made in this case respects the *choice of an apostle*. "Show, Lord," say the apostles, "which of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and *apostleship*."

Is there any room to doubt here, that the apostles did appeal to the same Lord who had chosen them, to designate who should fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Judas?

1 Cor. iv. 4, 5: "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." That *Lord* (Κύριος) here means *Christ*, is plain, both from the office of judging ascribed to him, and from his *coming* to judgment. Without citing numerous other passages, which confessedly represent *Christ* as the final Judge of all the human race, permit me here to ask, Is it possible for any being who is not *omniscient* to judge the universe of intelligent creatures? Can he for thousands of years (possibly of ages) be present everywhere, and know what is transacted; can he penetrate the recesses of the human heart; can he remember the

whole character and actions of countless myriads, so diverse in talents, temper, circumstances, and situation; and yet be finite—be neither *omnipresent* nor *omniscient*? God claims it as his distinguishing and peculiar prerogative, that he knows the secrets of the human heart, (Jer. xvii. 10); what then must he be who knows the secrets of all hearts at all times, and in all worlds? If he be not God, the proof that the Father is God is defective too; and we have the question again to dispute with the Manicheans, whether Jehovah be not a limited and imperfect being.

“But,” you will say, “Christ acts as judge by delegated authority: why not, then, by knowledge imparted to him?” He does indeed *act* as judge by delegated authority, because it is in his mediatorial capacity that he acts as judge; but to *act* as judge is one thing—to be *qualified* for such an office is another. Exaltation as mediator constitutes him judge in that capacity; *omnipresence* and *omniscience only* can qualify him for the duties of that station. And can *omniscience* be *imparted*? We may as well say *omnipotence* or *self-existence* can be imparted. There is and there can be but *one* God; and a second omniscient being (omniscient simply by knowledge *imparted*,) would force us into all the absurdities of polytheism.

Rev. ii. 23: “And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” The same person speaks here who “was dead and is alive,” *i. e.* Christ, (chap. i. 18).

The sense of the passage is too plain to need any comment.

To conclude this head: When I compare such passages as those above cited, with the description of divine omniscience, how can I doubt that the New Testament writers mean to ascribe the *knowledge of all things* to Christ? To say that whatsoever pertains to God or man, is known by any being, is to predicate omniscience of that being. Compare now with this the knowledge which God ascribes to himself only, in Jer. xvii. 9, 10: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

## 2. *Divine power is ascribed to Christ.*

Phil. iii. 21: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

Compare now this passage, 1 Cor. xv. 26—28, where the same language is applied to God the Father. And if "to subdue all things to himself," (*ὑποτάξαι τὰ πάντα ἑαυτῷ*) be not characteristic of omnipotence in Phil. iii. 21, when applied to Christ, why should it be when applied in the 28th verse to the Father?

Heb. i. 3: "Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down



on the right hand of the majesty on high." The word *φέρων*, which is translated *upholding*, means *preserving, directing, governing*. Thus Chrysostom,—*φέρων*, says he *κυβερνων, διαπιπτοντα συγκρατων, i. e. governing, preserving* things perishable. So the corresponding Hebrew word, in Isa. xlv. 3: lxiii. 9.

In John x. 18, Christ says, "I have power to lay down my life, and to resume it again." In other places, the resurrection of Jesus is ascribed to God,—Acts ii. 24, 32: iii. 15: v. 30; 1 Cor. vi. 14: xv. 15.

In 2 Pet. i. 3, *divine power* (*θεϊα δύναμις*) is ascribed to Christ; compare verse 16.

Most decisive, however, of divine power belonging to Christ, are those passages above, which ascribe to him the creation of the universe. This is the distinguishing characteristic of Jehovah. Jer. x. 10—16: "But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King. At his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind

out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. *The portion of Jacob is not like them; for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the Lord of hosts is his name.*"

Acts xiv. 15: "Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the *living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.*"

When I read such passages, and compare them with the creative power ascribed to Christ, I cannot but admit, with the apostle, "that he who *built all things is God.*"

### 3. ETERNITY is ascribed to Christ.

That those passages of Scripture which speak of Christ's existence before the creation of the world, do not explicitly assert his eternity, I have already suggested. But then it is difficult to conceive that they do not *imply* eternity. "For," says Doederlein\* "to exist before the beginning of the world, what can it mean but to exist from eternity?" Passages of this nature are the following,—viz. John i. 1: "*In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

\* Inst. Theol. i. p. 390.

God." 1 John i. 2: "For the Life was manifested; and we have seen it and bear witness, and show unto you that *eternal Life*, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." John xvii. 5: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee *before the world was*." John xvii. 24: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me *before the foundation of the world*."

But specially do I apprehend that Rev. xxii. 13, is decisive on this subject: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." That it is Christ who here speaks, is clear; for (1.) in the preceding verse he says, "Behold I *come* quickly." (2.) In the 16th verse, the same person says, "I Jesus have sent mine angel," &c. Now the same description that is here applied to Christ, is given of the eternity of God, in chap. xxi. 5, 6: compare verses 7th and 3rd. To know still more fully what this form of expression means, we must recur to the Old Testament, where we find it divested of its peculiar shape. In Isaiah xlv. 6, Jehovah says, "I am the first and I am the last; and besides me there is no God," *i. e.* eternity distinguishes me from all that are falsely called gods. So in Isaiah xlviii. 12, after declaring that he will not suffer his name to be polluted, nor give his glory to another, he adds, "I am he (*i. e.* the true God)—I am the first, and I also am the last."

Now, if the same things be asserted of Christ, (as plainly they are in the texts under consideration,) how can we avoid the conclusion, that the holy apostle meant to assert his eternal existence?

4. *Divine honours and worship are ascribed to Christ.*

John v. 23: "That all men might honour the Son even as they honour the Father." On this text I have before remarked (page 112) in another connexion.

Heb. i. 6: "Let all the angels of God worship him."

The word *worship*, it is said, has two significations,—viz. *obeisance*, and *spiritual homage*. This is true; and the first of these meanings often presents itself in the Old Testament and (as I am willing to concede) in the Gospels. Many who worshipped Christ, while he sojourned among men—*i. e.* prostrated themselves before him—probably knew or acknowledged nothing of his divine nature. But what shall we say of the *angels*? Are *they* ignorant of his true nature? And is not the worship which they who are pure spirits pay, of course *spiritual*, and not simple obeisance?

Phil. ii. 10, 11: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

"Things in heaven, earth, and under the earth," is a common periphrasis of the Hebrew and New Testament writers for the *universe* (το παν, or

τα παντα). What can be meant by things in heaven, *i. e.* beings in heaven, bowing the knee to Jesus, if spiritual worship be not meant?

What other worship can heaven render? And if the worship of Christ in heaven be spiritual, should not that of others, who ought to be in temper united with them, be spiritual also? And when it is added, this worship shall be “to the glory of God the Father,” I understand the sentiment to be, that Jesus, in his mediatorial character, is the proper object of universal adoration; but as this character has a peculiar connexion with and relation to God the Father, so the worship paid to Christ the Mediator should redound to the glory of the Father as well as of himself.

Rom. x. 9—14: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For their is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

The Lord, *on whose name they are to call*, is



plainly Christ; for he is the same in whom *they are to believe* (verses 11 and 14.) And this Lord (Christ) on whom they are to call, and in whom they are to believe, is *Κυριος παντων*, *universal Lord*, and therefore able to bestow the blessings which they need.

Rev. v. 8—14: “And when he (*i.e.* Christ, see v. 6, 7) took the book, the four beasts and four-and-twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,—saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four-and-twenty

elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever."

If this be not *spiritual* worship, and if Christ be not the object of it here, I am unable to produce a case where worship can be called spiritual and divine.

*The apostles and primitive martyrs worshipped Christ; and they recognise the practice of worshipping him among other Christians.*

Acts vii. 59, 60: "And they stoned Stephen, making invocation (ἐπικαλούμενον) and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now here is a dying martyr, who is expressly said "to be filled with the Holy Ghost," and to enjoy the vision of the heavenly world, and of the Saviour who was there—in his last moments, too—on the very verge of eternity—here is such a martyr committing his departing spirit into the hands of the Lord Jesus, in the very same language, and with the same confidence, with which Jesus, when expiring upon the cross, committed his spirit into the hands of the Father. This expiring disciple also implores forgiveness for his murderers. Of whom does he implore it? Of the same Lord Jesus. Can a departing spirit be entrusted to any being, and the forgiveness of sin be expected of him, who has not omnipotence and supreme authority? And can a dying martyr, with his

eyes fixed on the very vision of God, and his soul filled with the Holy Ghost, ask and pray amiss?

2 Cor. xii. 8, 9: "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

The *Lord*, whom Paul here *besought*, is plainly Christ; for this same Lord, in answer to the Apostle's supplication, says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength (*ἡ δύναμις μου*) is perfected in weakness." Then the Apostle immediately subjoins, "Most gladly then would I rejoice in my infirmities, that the *strength of CHRIST* (*ἡ δύναμις Χριστοῦ*) may rest upon me." A clearer case that Christ was the object of the Apostle's repeated prayer, cannot well be presented.

1 Thess. iii. 11, 12: "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you."

Can any distinction be here made between the rank of those who are addressed by the Apostle? And does not the 12th verse plainly show that the supplication of the apostle is specially directed to the Lord, *i. e.* Christ.

2 Thess. ii. 16, 17: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting con-

solation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work."

Here the order of the persons to whom supplication is made is the reverse of that in the last instance quoted; which shows that nothing depends on the *order*, but that it was a matter of indifference with the apostle which was placed first—the supplication being equally addressed to the Father and to Christ.

Rom. i. 7: "To all that be in Rome beloved of God—called to be saints—grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Here the same blessings are solicited and expected from Christ and the Father. (See the same formula repeated 1 Cor. i. 3: 2 Cor. i. 2.)

Acts i. 24: "And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen."

That *Lord* here means the Lord Jesus, seems evident from verses 21 and 22. It is the usual appellation, moreover, which the Book of Acts gives to the Saviour. (See above, p. 90.)

2 Tim. iv. 14: "The Lord reward him according to his works!" Again, verses 17 and 18: "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever

and ever. Amen." (Compare iii. 11.) Usage hardly admits a doubt here that *Lord* means Christ.

Nor can I separate from religious invocation, trust, and confidence, such expressions as these : (Acts iii. 6) "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Nor can I see how the solemn adjuration by Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) which the apostle uses, Rom. ix. 1; 1 Tim. ii. 7, can be separated from religious invocation or appeal.

We must add to all these instances of worship the fact, that Christians were so habituated to address their supplications to Christ, that "they who invoke Christ" became, it would seem, a kind of proper name by which they were, in primitive times, designated as Christians.

Thus Paul (1 Cor. i. 2) addresses himself to all *who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, IN EVERY PLACE. That the verb *ἐπικαλεῶ* is an appropriate one to designate the act of prayer, will not be questioned. The literal translation of it is *to invoke*. The simple meaning of the passage is, "I address myself to all Christians." But, instead of using the name Christians directly, the apostle uses a periphrasis, and says, *to all the invokers of Christ*, i. e. to those who pray to him, meaning the same as *ἀγίοις, κλητοῖς, &c.* in the context. He has signified, too, that the practice of *invoking Christ* was not confined to Corinth. He addresses "those who pray to Christ in *every place*" (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ).



Exactly in the same manner does Ananias describe Christians, when the Lord Jesus bade him go to instruct and comfort Saul. Acts ix. 13, 14: "Lord," said he, "I have heard of many concerning this man, what things he has done (τοῖς ἁγίοις σου) to thy saints at Jerusalem; and even now he has a commission from the high priest to bind all (τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου) those who invoke thy name,"—*i. e.* Christians. See the same thing repeated, verse 21st.

The very heathen, in the primitive age of Christianity, little as they knew about Christians, discovered that they made Christ an object of worship. Says Pliny, in writing to Trajan,\* (Lib. x. Ep. 97,) "They (Christians) sing in social worship a hymn to Christ as a God."

Eusebius, too, (Eccl. Hist. v. 28,) in writing against the Artemonites, appeals to the ancient songs of Christians, thus: "Whatever psalms and hymns were composed by faithful brethren, from the beginning *praise Christ the Word of God.*" Can any example of a church in the apostolic age, who did not practise this, be produced?

Did not the Saviour give his disciples a general precept and encouragement to make him the object of prayer? "If ye shall ask any thing in my name," *i. e.* as my disciples, on my account, said he to the apostles, "I will accomplish it" (ἐγὼ ποιήσω). (John xiv. 13, 14.) They appear to me

\* Carmen Christo, quasi Deo, soliti essent (*i. e.* Christiani,) dicere secum invicem.

to have understood this as directing that he should be regarded by them as the special object of prayer. Hence, instead of finding few or no examples of prayer to Christ, in the history of the primitive Christians, as exhibited in the New Testament, I find more of this nature than of any other.

When I have contemplated the precepts which encourage prayer to Christ and the worship of him, both by the inhabitants of the heavenly world, and by the churches on earth, I then compare these things with the exclusive worship and trust which Jehovah claims to himself. Isa. xlv. 22, 23 : “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth ; for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Isa. xlii. 8 : “I am the Lord ; that is my name ; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” Jer. xvii. 5—7 : “Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh ; but shall inhabit parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” Matt. iv. 10 : “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan ; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and HIM ONLY shalt thou serve.”

I am ready now to ask, whether I can avoid

coming to the conclusion, either that Christ is truly divine, inasmuch as he is so often represented as the object of worship; or that the sacred writers have mistaken this great point, and led us to that which must be considered as idolatry. And yet the worship of Christ is placed, as it would seem, in opposition to that of idols. (1 Cor. viii. 4—6.) That Christianity utterly and for ever renounces all idolatry, all polytheism—in a word, every thing inconsistent with the worship of one only living and true God—is a point so plain and so universally conceded, that I shall not dwell for a moment upon it.

Were it not that I fear becoming tedious, by detailing my reasons for believing in the divine nature of Christ, I should add a great number of texts, which require us with all the heart to *love* him, to *obey* him, to *confide* in him, and to *commit ourselves* to him, in such a manner as I can never persuade myself to do with respect to any being who is not God. The New Testament tells me that my consolation, my privilege, my happiness, must be derived from *trusting in Christ*. But can I trust myself to a *finite* being, when I have an *infinite, almighty, all-sufficient* GOD to whom I may go? Shall I be satisfied with a mite, when I can have the mines of Peru?

I should also add those texts, some of which are very striking ones, where, in the New Testament, the very same things are applied to Christ, which in the Old Testament are affirmed of Jehovah. Some of these follow.

Isa. vi. 5—10. “Then said I, Woe is me ! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us ? Then said I, Here am I, send me. And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not ; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”

Mal. iii. 1. “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me ; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in ; behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Ps. lxxviii. 56. “Yet they tempted and provoked the *most high God*, and kept not his testimonies.”

John xii. 37—41. “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him ; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report ? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed ? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart ; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and spake of HIM.”

Mark i. 2. “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

1 Cor. x. 9. “Neither let us tempt *Christ*, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.”

It were easy to increase the number of such passages as these; but I shall desist. Instead of that want of evidence in the New Testament, with respect to the divinity of Christ, of which you repeatedly speak, and in strong terms, I find evidence almost everywhere to illustrate and confirm the doctrine in question.

Thus have I endeavoured to show that the New Testament bestows upon Christ the appellation of God, accompanied by such adjuncts as naturally, not to say necessarily, lead us to understand this word in its highest sense—that it attributes to him equality with God—that it represents him as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; declares his omniscience, his omnipotence, and his eternity; and, both by precepts and examples, exhibits Christ as the object of prayer and divine worship by the church in heaven and on earth. To these conclusions do the plain rules of exegesis necessarily conduct me. I am sensible that allegations are frequently made, that we receive our systems of belief from the creeds and confessions of faith which have descended from former unenlightened and superstitious or philosophising ages. That some of our *phraseology* has been derived from men who *sometimes* speculated too boldly, and substituted names for ideas, I am ready to concede. I feel the embarrassments that, on account of this, are occasionally thrown in the way of inculcating truth at the present time. Men are very apt to suppose that, if you throw away the old *terms* or *names*, you reject the old ideas also.



Yet it can be only superficial thinkers who will soberly believe this. It is in general, therefore, a sufficient reason with me for dismissing phraseology, when it must, almost of necessity, be misunderstood by the great body of men. Yet a sudden and entire revolution in the common technical terms of theology, would be very undesirable; because such a revolution must again lead, at first, to other misapprehensions. I am willing, therefore, to retain many terms, which have become venerable for their antiquity, that I should reject without hesitation if they were now presented *de novo*.

I am not conscious of being led to the adoption of Trinitarian views, or to the ascription of true and proper divinity to Christ, by any creed or any human authority on earth. Unless I am quite ignorant of myself, the only influence which creeds and confessions exercise over me is to modify my *phraseology*. I take the language of theology as I find it; and do not venture upon the composition of a new nomenclature.

My sole business, these ten years past, has been the study of the Bible; and the study of it in the daily use of those principles of exegesis, which you have, for the most part, so briefly and so happily described. I began this study, as I believed, with a desire to know what the Bible has taught. I have pursued it with increased desire, with unabated ardour. I have limited my studies to no one class of writers; but have solicitously endeavoured to seek for truth, and to receive it

thankfully, from whatever quarter it might come. In particular, at least three quarters of my time have been spent among writers of the Unitarian class, from whom I have received, with gratitude, much instruction relative to the philology, the exegesis, and the literary history of the Scriptures. I am accustomed to reject any explanation of the Scriptures that is not founded upon the general principles of exegesis which you have developed. Whether an *orthodox* or *heterodox* use can be made of any interpretation, is what I habitually endeavour to lay out of view when I interpret the Scriptures. The simple question which I desire to place before me is, "What has God said? What has Christ taught?" I aim at being guided by the fundamental principles of explanation in all writings, when I pursue these inquiries in the Scriptures. And when I come to a satisfactory answer, I regard this as of divine authority—as *real orthodoxy*, in the highest and best sense of the word.

I do not, indeed, regard the opinions of great and good men, in past ages, as unworthy of attention, and even of reverence. If I read them with a proper temper of mind, there are few of them who may not be read with profit. The reasonings of Athanasius and Augustine I can peruse with pleasure; so I can those of Calvin and Edwards. But I adopt no opinion because they adopted it. The *reasons* of their opinion are the object of my investigation. It is of but little interest to me, to know simply that they believed this or that doc-

trine. And with the very same object, I read the *opponents* of these great men. I can say with truth, that much more of my reading life has been spent among the opponents of my sentiments, than among the friends of them. Can you make the same affirmation? ✓

After all, it is a principle by which, if I have any knowledge of my own heart, I desire for ever to be guided to "call no man master on earth." I would place the decision of Scripture, fairly made out, IMMEASURABLY ABOVE all human opinions. I regard the one as the decision of an *unerring* GOD—the other as the opinions of *fallible men*.

It is with such views and principles of reasoning that I have come to the conclusions which have been developed in these Letters.

And now, in concluding this Letter, permit me to say, that as reason does not and cannot decide against the doctrine of the Trinity, as explained in my second Letter, nor against the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, the question whether these are truths or not, rests solely on the decision of revelation. What then is that decision? This question I have endeavoured to answer.

I will now acknowledge that I was induced to undertake the above examination, in consequence of the challenge which you make (p. 9,) in the following words: "We challenge our opponents to adduce *one* passage in the New Testament, where the word *God*, . . . . unless turned from its

usual sense by the connexion, does not mean the Father." I have accepted this challenge—not, I hope, in the spirit of contest, but with the desire of contributing, so far as lies in my power, to develope what the New Testament does teach. I have laboured to show, that the very reason, above all other reasons, why I believe Christ to be truly divine, is *because the connexion, when he is called God, ascribes to him such attributes and works as leave me no room to doubt that the New Testament writers meant to assert his proper divinity.*

After stating your apprehensions in regard to the doctrine that Christ has two natures, the belief of which, you affirm, is "an enormous tax on human credulity," you say (p. 14), "I am aware that these remarks will be met by two or three texts, in which Christ is called God, and by a class of passages, not very numerous, in which divine properties are said to be ascribed to him." Whether the number of texts in which Christ is called God, amounts to no more than *two or three*, it would be superfluous now to inquire, when they lie before us, and can easily be counted. We can also judge whether the "class of passages" is "not very numerous, in which divine properties are said to be ascribed to him," with equal facility. It is too late, however, for you and me to rest our faith upon the *number* of passages that inculcate a doctrine. We have conceded the Bible to be of divine authority. The simple question is, what, according to the rules of interpretation in all other cases, does any passage mean? This being ascer-

tained, only two courses are before us,—the *one*, to receive its meaning as the guide of our faith; the *other*, to reject its authority, and deny our obligation to believe the decisions of the Scripture. If the New Testament does teach that Christ is not really divine, but a finite creature, and this can be made out by an unbiassed interpretation of it, I will either receive this doctrine—receive it implicitly (for, if I am not deceived in respect to myself, I only desire to know what God has taught, in order to believe it)—or else I will reject all claims to inspiration in the sacred writers, and follow their instructions only so far as they coincide with my own speculations. I am fully satisfied that there is no middle path here; and that a man who investigates for himself, extensively and independently, must eventually follow one or the other of these courses. ✓

Convince me, then, that you apply the principles of interpretation which you have laid down in an unbiassed manner, and that the New Testament does, according to them, clearly teach that Jesus is not, and cannot be, divine, and you will make me a convert to the doctrines (at least some of them) which you embrace. Where the apostles lead me, I will go, or else renounce all deference to them. While I have a being also, I will cherish a grateful remembrance of any man who shall convince me, by sound reasoning, that I am in an error, and am wandering from the paths of life. ✓

But you will allow me to say, what you will doubtless affirm of yourself, “I cannot be con-



vinced until I am satisfied that my principles of interpretation are wrong, and my application of them erroneous." You have described (p. 14) in what manner you avoid the conclusion drawn from those texts which call Christ *God*, and which apparently ascribe divine attributes to him. On the principles of exegesis there disclosed, I shall remark in another Letter. I will at present say only, that they appear to me far from being well established.

Your candour will easily concede, that the positions which I have just laid down are correct, and are such as become every sincere lover of truth. I am very ready to grant that we ought not to expect to convince you and your friends, by using reproachful epithets or severe appellations. We cannot convince you by appealing to our New England fathers or their creeds—to the ancient fathers of the church, or any body of men whatever. You may always reply to us, "Are not men fallible? and have not the best of uninspired men cherished some errors? Give us the *reasons* why our fathers received the doctrines in question, and then we will hear you. The fact that they did receive them is a part of church history, but certainly no theological argument. The Papal hierarchy is supported by the fathers; and there never has been a sect in Christendom who could not, sooner or later, make an appeal to fathers whom they respected."

Nor can we convince you, by a tenacious and unreasonable opposition to all critical examination

of the New Testament, or by throwing out hints in our sermons or writings, that critical studies belong only to those who have a wish to be heretical or sceptical, or by a forced and mystical explanation of various passages of Scripture, and converting them to the support of sentiments which they never were designed to support. The sound rules of interpretation will soon sweep away every vestige of such defective opinions about the Word of God; and orthodoxy must stand or fall by the simple decision of the Scriptures, interpreted according to the general laws of language.

On the other hand, you will as cheerfully concede, too, that we cannot be convinced by calling us hard names—by misrepresenting our sentiments—by proving that Calvin helped to burn Servetus ✓—by affirming that our sentiments come from creeds and confessions of human authority, fabricated by superstition and philosophy—by representing us as gloomy, superstitious, malignant, and unsocial—by appropriating to Unitarians all that is kind and noble, and generous and exalted, and leaving to us the opposites of these virtues—by affirming that we are desirous of infringing Christian liberty, and establishing an inquisition to defend our sentiments, and exhorting others to resist such tyranny—or by representing us as admitting in words that God is kind and paternal, while we think meanly of him, and treat him as the heathen did their Jupiter. Such things may add fuel to the fire of controversy; but can the lover of truth and the Word of God be convinced by them?

They are the arts indeed of controversialists—and arts like them, I am sorry to say, are not confined to any one party. Passion has more control over disputants than they are aware of. Zeal for what they believe to be truth is what they think inspires them; while perhaps their words, or the spirit of their representations, “breathe out threatenings,” if not “slaughter,” to their opponents. I hardly dare trust myself to write this paragraph, lest I should catch the spirit while I am describing it. I know, in some measure, how frail I am; but I think I do sincerely disapprove of such a spirit, in whatever party it may be found.

In consulting writers of different views and sentiments, one is grieved to find how much of this spirit is indulged. I have seen it even in many great and good men. Possessed of feelings naturally ardent, I feel that there is reason to tremble for myself, lest I may, in some respect or other, transgress the laws of christian propriety in these Letters, and hinder something of the conviction, in the minds of some, which they might possibly produce.

In one thing we shall certainly be agreed: The sober inquirer after truth must be convinced by reason and argument. All else is nothing to him. And, where these lead him he will go. The path of truth is the path of duty. The approbation of God for a sincere, candid, honest, believing heart, is worth infinitely more than all the honour which party zeal can bestow, or the world is able to give.

## LETTER IV.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

In my last Letter I endeavoured to offer reasons why I believe that Christ is *truly divine*. You will very naturally expect me to take some notice of those texts on which you would specially rely to prove his inferiority to the Father. This I must do, but in as summary a manner as possible: not because it would not be easy to say much, even more easy than to write briefly, and yet with perspicuity, but because there would be danger of protracting the subject, and tiring the patience of both writer and reader.

Let me begin, then, by stating certain things which are intimately connected with the subject in question. While I believe that Christ is truly divine, I believe that he is as truly human—that he was a real man, and lived, acted, suffered, and died as a man. He resembled, however, man in his primitive state, *i. e.* Adam, as he came out of

the hands of his Maker. He was pure and sinless ; but he possessed all the feelings and all the innocent infirmities of human nature. I know no proposition that can be proved from the New Testament, if this cannot ; nor do I know of an opinion more inconsistent with the whole history of Jesus than that of the Docetæ, who averred that Christ was a man in appearance merely, and not in reality.

I regret that I am not able to find in your sermon an intimation that Christ was truly and properly a man. All that you appear to maintain is, that he was a being distinct from the Father, and inferior to him. Perhaps I must retract, therefore, my sentence against the Docetæ, lest I should seem to have treated your opinion with severity. But the state of my mind, in regard to the weight of evidence, I cannot retract. If the evidence be not overwhelming that Christ was perfectly a man, I cannot conceive it possible that any point in theology or morals is capable of being established by the language of the New Testament.

The *Gnostics* maintained, that from the Supreme Divinity proceeded certain Eons, who were a kind of *lesser gods* (*dii minores*), and one of which (Christ) created the world. This Eon descended upon Jesus at his baptism, and forsook him at his crucifixion. In what important respect that opinion differs from this, which holds that Christ had a super-angelic soul united to a human body, I confess I cannot see. The Socinian theory seems to me incomparably more rational and more tenable than any shade of the Arian hypothesis.



If the evidence be not complete that Christ was really a man from his birth, actions, sufferings, death, and affirmations respecting himself, then how is it to be proved that Christ ever existed at all? And will any one refuse his assent to the proposition that Christ possessed a divine nature, because he cannot see *how* a union of the divine and human natures could take place, and yet believe that *a human body was united to a soul not human*? To what order or class of beings, then, does this new *compound* and strange mixed person belong? He is not divine—he is not human, for a human soul is surely *essential* to human nature—nor is he angelic, for angels have no corporeal forms. Are we to be freed from *mystery*, then, by such a theory? It seems to me, if there be mystery in any theory which has ever been proposed, respecting the person of Christ, it may surely be found here. I will not say (as you do about the two-fold nature of Christ, in which we believe,) that “it is an enormous tax upon human credulity;” but I can say, that it appears to me as much like such a tax as any theory with which the church has hitherto been agitated. I can never bring myself to view it as probable, in any degree, unless I find it in the Scriptures. But there I find that the *Logos*, who existed before the world was made, was *God—that God who created the universe*. I cannot then admit him to be a super-angelic being simply, until I am convinced either that John was mistaken, or that his language has a different meaning from that which it appears to have.

As to the theory which maintains that Christ was God's *own proper* Son, before the creation of the world (of course before his incarnation), and God's own Son in the same sense or in as real and proper a sense as Solomon was the son of David, it is natural to ask, first, Who, then, was his *mother*? And, secondly, How much does such a theory of Divinities in the Christian system differ from that which admitted a Jupiter and his progeny to be gods, among the Greeks and Romans?

We do then (if you will allow me to use your own expressive words, though applied by you in a connexion somewhat different,) “we do maintain that the human properties and circumstances of Christ, his birth, sufferings, and death—his praying to God, his ascribing to God all his power and offices—the acknowledged properties of Christ, we say, *oblige* us to interpret” them of *human nature*; and to draw the conclusion, that whatever could be predicated of a real man, pious and sinless, might be predicated of him. How would he—how *could* he—have assumed our nature (except as the Docetæ affirmed that he did,—viz. in *appearance* only,) unless every thing could be predicated of him which properly belongs to man? Accordingly, we know that he increased in wisdom, stature, and favour with God and man—that he ate, drank, slept, laboured—was fatigued, hungry, thirsty—rejoiced and sympathized with his brethren, wept, was in an agony—prayed, bled, died, was buried, and rose again. If these things do not for ever exclude all hope of making any shade of

the Arian theory probable, I must confess myself a stranger to the nature of evidence, and to what the New Testament contains.

To return to my purpose. The proper humanity of Christ being considered as an established fact, I have one general observation to make on the principles of exegesis, which are connected with it. It is this: That inasmuch as Christ has truly a human nature, every thing said of him in respect to this nature must necessarily be spoken of him in a capacity in which he is inferior to the Father. In a word, as his human nature is inferior to the divine, so, whatever has relation to it, or is predicated of it, must of course be that which implies inferiority to the divine.

Do you ask me how you shall distinguish when a text speaks of Christ in respect to his human nature, or in respect to his divine nature? I answer, just as when you speak of a man, you distinguish whether what is said relates to his body or his soul. When I say Abraham is *dead*, I mean, obviously, his *mortal* part. When I say Abraham is *alive*, I mean, obviously, his *immortal* part. When the Evangelist says that Jesus increased in stature and wisdom, and in favour with God and man—that he ate, drank, slept, prayed, suffered, died, and rose again—he obviously means that his human nature did this. When he affirms that the *Logos* is God, and made the universe, and when Paul says that he is “supreme God, blessed for ever,” I cannot help thinking it to be equally obvious, that they predicate this of his

divine nature. The simple answer to your question then, is, that we must determine which nature is described by what is affirmed concerning it. *The subject is known by its predicates.*

To the remarks just made on the proper humanity of Christ, and the principles of exegesis which result from it, let me add,

*Secondly*, That the appellation *Father* is not always used to designate that distinction in the Godhead, which we commonly describe by calling it *the first person*; but that it is sometimes a general title of the divine nature. (See Deut. xxxii. 6. Isa. lxiii. 16; lxiv. 3. Matt. v. 16, 48; vi. 4; vii. 11. John viii. 41.) In the same manner (*Κυριος*) *Lord* is applied often to Christ in particular, and to God as a general appellation. The Divinity is called *Father*, on account of that peculiar and provident care which he extends to all the creatures of his power. He is called *Lord* (*Κυριος*) because of his universal dominion.

Proper attention to this obvious principle will explain several passages, which have been thought to relate merely to what is denominated the first person in the Trinity, and to ascribe properties to him in an exclusive manner.

*Thirdly*, There is another observation which I cannot refrain from making here, and which seems to me of great importance, in regard to our mode of thinking and reasoning, on the subject of the distinction in the Godhead. This is, that no terms, which are applied by the Scriptures to

designate this distinction, or to predicate any thing of it, can be supposed *fully* and *definitely* to express what exists in the Godhead, or what is done by it. The obvious reason of this is, that the language of men (being all formed from perceptions of finite objects, by beings who are of yesterday, and whose sphere of knowledge is extremely limited) cannot possibly be adequate to express *fully* and *definitely* what pertains to the self-existent and infinite God. How often do men forget this in their reasonings about the Deity! In some things nearly all men agree in observing caution, with regard to language which is applied to God. When the Scripture speaks of his having eyes, ears, hands, feet, &c., all men of a sound mind understand these terms as figurative; for the obvious reason that "God is a spirit," and that things of this nature can be literally predicated only of human beings that have flesh and blood. We mean to say, God *sees*, God *hears*, God *moves*, &c., when we attribute to him those members which we employ in performing such actions. And still, this is only the language of *approximation* to full description. What corresponds in the infinite, omniscient, omnipresent Spirit, to our *seeing*, and *hearing*, and *moving*, &c., must necessarily be different, in many important respects, from all these things in us.

When we say, "God is in heaven; the Lord looked down, or came down, from heaven; Jehovah sits upon a throne high and lifted up,"—or when we predicate any thing of him, which cor-



responds to the exaltation and magnificence of earthly monarchs,—we understand, of course, that this language is not to be taken literally, and as being fully adequate to the description aimed at, but only as that of approximation. When we say, “God is angry; God hates; God scorns; the Lord will deride, will laugh, will frown, will abhor,” &c., do we predicate all these things of God in a literal manner, or do we understand them all as conveying to us an idea of something in the divine affections, actions, or mode of treating us, which corresponds to something that is in men, or which they do? The answer is very obvious; and in all this use of language, we apprehend or feel little or no difficulty. At least, none but enthusiastic visionaries, who would fain make heaven like earth, and God like themselves; or ignorant men, whose thoughts are chained down to objects of sense, as to be incapable of elevation above them, are embarrassed by such expressions, or substantially misapprehend them.

Are we not now prepared to advance one step farther? May we not say, when the Scripture speaks of the *Logos*, as becoming flesh and dwelling among us—of his dwelling in the bosom of the Father—of his coming from God and being sent of him—of his humbling himself, and taking upon himself the condition of a servant, and other things of a like nature,—that we are not to suppose this language is adequate to describe, *fully* and *definitely*, the incarnation of the *Logos*, or his distinction from, or connexion with, the Father?

If I may be allowed so to express myself, *it is all language of approximation*. It is so of course, and necessarily, as it regards any description of the *manner* of these things. Language, from its very nature, must be inadequate to such description. It was not formed with such facts in view; and finite beings, with knowledge so limited as ours, may well be supposed incapable of forming it, so as to be adequate to the full and definite description of what pertains to the Divinity. It may, nevertheless, express enough to excite our highest interest, and to command our best obedience, if we feel and act as rational beings. And so much is undoubtedly accomplished in the case which has just been stated.

The principle of exegesis here exhibited, had it been early acknowledged, and generally regarded in practice, would have saved the world much dispute, and two classes of men in particular, much trouble. The one of these are men, who, while admitting the inadequacy of language, in other respects, fully and definitely to describe the Divinity, have taken it for granted here, that no such inadequateness was to be found, and have sought to define and distinguish, until they have overwhelmed themselves and their readers with subtilities too tenuous for comprehension. The other, hostile to the doctrine of a distinction in the Godhead, have forced upon the expressions in question a sense that was far-fetched, and which violence only could make them to speak. It seems to me, that the path of sound reason and common

sense is the medium between these two extremes. I would not do violence to the expressions in question, nor would I understand them as *fully* and *definitely* describing what does exist in God, or is done by him. I believe they are the *language of approximation*; that they signify something which is in God, or something that has been done by him, that corresponds to those things among men which would be described by similar language—something of the highest interest, of the deepest moment to the welfare of the human race. And though it might gratify my curiosity, and perhaps my pride, to know something more of the divine constitution, or mode of existing and acting, yet I can have no assurance, no good reason to believe, that it would contribute at present to facilitate my duties, or increase my happiness. I certainly have no good reason to suppose, that, in the present state, I am capable of understanding such subjects, beyond what is already revealed respecting them.

*Fourthly*, The attentive observer cannot but notice, that whether we contemplate God in his works or in his word, we cannot fail of finding things which are beyond our comprehension or power of explanation. The book of nature and of revelation, so far as they bring to view the being, character, and designs of the self-existent and infinite God, who created and governs the world, must contain many passages, of the meaning of which we can never obtain more than a general and imperfect knowledge. “We know but in part.”

In offering, then, to the mind a view of what

God is, and what he has done, we do not expect (at least we cannot reasonably expect) that this view should be all light, without any shade. Admitting that the Scriptures are of divine origin and authority, the question between us and Unitarians, in respect to what is revealed about the divine Being, is not whether the view which we suppose the Bible gives, is embarrassed by no obscurities—is without a shade—or whether theirs is such. The proper question is—Taking it for granted that what the Scriptures declare is true, which view, on the whole, comports best with the language of the sacred writings?—which is attended with the least embarrassment, all things considered? I well know, that a moderate portion of sagacity will suffice to enable any one to press many questions upon Trinitarians, that are of difficult solution—many which are, in our present state, incapable of any solution. But I believe that the same degree of sagacity would enable one to raise more formidable difficulties still in the way of Unitarian sentiments.

In expounding texts of Scripture, therefore, which relate to the present subject in dispute, I am not very solicitous to give an interpretation which shall be above all question or embarrassment, whenever it appears to me that a different or contrary exposition will be attended with still greater embarrassments.

With the preceding observations before us, let me proceed to remark on some of the New Testament representations of Christ, which have been

supposed to present difficulties in regard to the views that Trinitarians defend.

Christ, in his mediatorial capacity, is, as I apprehend, ever to be regarded as that complex person who may be described as human or divine,—in like manner as we may say of ourselves, we are *mortal* or *immortal*. As Mediator, then, it may be truly said, that by his obedience he merited and obtained a high reward,—*i. e.* this is predicated of that nature which was capable of obeying, and of being rewarded. So God is said to have “highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name.” (Phil. ii. 9—11.) In a similar way, all power is *given* him in heaven and in earth; *i. e.* he is constituted “head over all things to his church.” (Matt. xxviii. 18.) Acting as such a head, “all enemies are put under his feet.” (1 Cor. xv. 25—27.) And this mediatorial dominion, when the work of a mediator is completed, will be resigned at the final judgment. (1 Cor. xv. 28.)

Of the same tenor are many passages. When God is said to be the head of Christ, (1 Cor. xi. 3.) I understand it of that nature of which this can be predicated. When Christ is called the image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image (χαρακτηρ) of his person, *i. e.* of him; or the only-begotten of the Father; the Son of God; God’s own Son; God’s beloved Son; his dear Son, &c.; I understand all these as descriptions of his mediatorial nature and station. I know indeed that many of these texts have been appropriated by some Trinitarians to



prove the divine nature of Christ—in my apprehension, however, injudiciously, and without any solid reason. Texts of this class may be found, Matt. xvii. 5. John i. 14; x. 36; xiv. 10; iii. 35. Col. i. 13. Heb. i. 5. Rom. viii. 29, 32.

In Heb. v. 7—10, is a passage which has occasioned much speculation. “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him: called of God an high priest, after the order of Melchisedec.”

If Christ had really a *human* nature, what is more perfectly consonant with reason and piety, than that he should act in the manner here described; or than that he should be exalted to glory as the reward of these actions, and be constituted the Saviour of his people?

It is certainly more difficult to satisfy the mind in regard to John xiv. 28,—“My Father is greater (*μειζον*) than I.” On examination, however, it appears not to be the object of Jesus to compare his own *nature* with that of the Father, but his *condition*. “If ye loved me,” said he to his weeping disciples, “ye would rejoice that I said, I go unto the Father; for the Father is greater than I,”—*i. e.* ye would rejoice that I am to leave this state of suffering and humiliation, and resume

that "glory which I had with the Father before the world was." You ought to rejoice at my exaltation to bliss and glory with the Father. So, in Hebrew, *great* is used for a state of prosperity, a happy state. (Gen. xxvi. 13.)

It is obvious here, that the whole text cannot be consistently explained, without the supposition of two natures,—the one which suffers and is depressed, in which, too, that other nature acts, that was in a state of glory with the Father before the world was,—*i. e.* from eternity. I cannot at all accede to the opinion of those interpreters, who suppose that the glory here spoken of is only that which the Father had *decreed* from eternity that Christ should have, in consequence of the promulgation of the gospel by him. The glory spoken of is not one that will result from what is to be done—it is a glory, *i. e.* a happiness or blessedness *which Christ had with the Father* (προς τον Πατερα) *before the world was.* On this passage the commentary of Kuinoel may be consulted, who has defended this exposition, as it seems to me, in a manner entirely unanswerable.

After all, it can be only in consequence of the peculiar union of the *Logos* with Jesus, that his *return to the Father* (so far as the *Logos* can be said to return) can be spoken of; and only in reference to his humiliation\* that his *return to glory* can be expected. A thousand questions can easily be raised, and as many difficulties

\* 'ΕΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΚΕΝΩΣΕ, ΕΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΤΑΠΕΙΝΩΣΕ, "He made himself void, he humbled himself."

suggested ; but they all spring from construing the language literally, and not merely as language which must, from the nature of the case, be that of *approximation*.

Mark xiii. 32, offers serious difficulties. “Of that day and hour knoweth no man—no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” The *day* and *hour* are, according to some, the day of judgment ; but, as I apprehend, (from comparing the context,) the day of vengeance to the Jews is meant. To solve the difficulty presented, some have objected to the reading οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός (neither the Son); but to support this objection, there are no adequate authorities. Others, with Hilary (de Trinitate ix.), say that *not to know* is *not to publish or declare*. “Ea nescit, quæ aut in tempore non sunt confitenda, aut non agnoscuntur ad meritum.” There is no doubt that the verb γινωσκω (*to know*) sometimes has the sense of *making known* ; but a derivative of the verb εἶδω (*video, to see*) is used here, which does not bear such a sense ; nor will the tenor of the verse admit it. To say, “That day and hour no man *maketh known*, neither the angels, nor the Son, but the Father,” would be the same as saying that the Father *does make it known*. But where has he revealed it ? After all, what more real difficulty presents itself in this case than in that where Jesus is said to have increased in wisdom ? (Luke ii. 52.) If he did possess a nature really human, that nature was capable, of course, of

progressive improvement and knowledge.\* And there is no proper method, as it appears to me, of solving the difficulty, as the text stands, but by appropriating, as in other cases, the expression to that nature of which the assertion made can be predicated.

John xvii. 3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." The *true God* here seems to me, plainly, not opposed to, or contrasted with, Christ; but, as everywhere else, in case this expression is used, *opposed to idols*. In the verse preceding, Christ says, "Thou hast given me power over ALL *flesh*, that thou mightest bestow eternal life upon ALL whom thou hast given me," *i. e.* both Gentiles and Jews. He proceeds,—"This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God (*the only God and true God*, the Greek is capable of being rendered, as to sense,) and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Now what is there here different from that which we preach and inculcate every Sabbath? Do we not teach that there is one only living and true God? And that he sent his Son to die for sinners?

\* Perhaps this expression requires to be a little guarded, by bearing in mind, that the author could not mean, that from a susceptibility of "progressive improvement and knowledge," he would infer that there ever was a time in which the human nature of Christ was imperfect. He evidently means that there was a progressive development of the *perfect* humanity of Christ, in wisdom, in action, and in suffering. From the nature of that part of his mediatorial work which was transacted on earth, such development must needs be progressive, until complete. This, I apprehend, is the doctrine stated in Heb. ii. 10.—EDITOR.

And do we not insist that eternal life is connected with the reception of these truths? I really see no more difficulty here than in the text, "God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

1 Cor. viii. 4—6: "As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or earth, (as there be gods many and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him: and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." I have cited several verses for the sake of introducing the context. From this it is plain that the one God, the Father, is not here placed in opposition to Christ, but to the *lords many and gods many* of the Heathen. If you insist that the *one God* is in opposition to *Christ*, or excludes him, then, for the same reason as Christ is the *one Lord* (εἷς Κύριος), you must insist that it is in opposition to the *Lordship* (Κυριότης) of the Father, and of course denies the *Lordship* of creation to him. It is plain, however, according to my apprehension, that *God* and *Lord* here are mere synonymes. (See verse 5th, where λεγόμενοι Θεοὶ is explained by Θεοὶ πολλοὶ and Κύριοι πολλοί.) Nothing is plainer than that Κύριος is a common title of God in the Old Testament and the New.



Moreover, what is predicated of the *one God* and *one Lord*, here is the same,—viz. they are the Author and Preserver of all things. The use of the preposition *δια*, in cases of this nature, has already been the subject of remark.

The nature of the whole case shows that the Apostle places the object of the Christian's worship in opposition to the Heathen or idol gods. What, then, is that object? The one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ; for whom are all things, and by whom are all things. The passage evidently holds out Christ to be, in the same manner, the object of the Christian's worship as the Father is. And, as the Apostle seems to me simply to assert the unity of God, in opposition to idols, I am not able to perceive how the divinity of the Saviour is impeached by it, any more than the Lordship of the Father is impeached by making Christ the *one Lord*. To embrace my view of the whole passage in a brief paraphrase, "Idols are nothing—there is but one God. There are indeed among the Heathen such as are *called gods* (λεγόμενοι Θεοὶ), who comprise *gods* and *lords* many; yet Christians have only one object of worship—one God and Lord."

John x. 25, 36: "If he called them gods, unto whom the Word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" Christ had previously said, "I and my Father are one." At this the Jews took up

stones to stone him, "because, being a man, he made himself God." It is perfectly clear that the Jews frequently understood, or pretended to understand, his affirmations respecting himself as amounting to assertions that he was truly divine. In this case, however, it is said that Jesus repelled such an interpretation of his words, by an explanation which shows that he applied to himself the word *God* only in an inferior sense.

I am not satisfied that the passage requires this exegesis. The reply of Jesus is evidently *argumentum ad hominem*. "If the Old Testament (the divine authority of which you admit) calls them *gods* to whom the Word of God was addressed, (Ps. lxxxii. 6.) *i. e.* if it call the magistrates of the Jews *gods*, is it not proper that I, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, should call myself the *Son of God*? If you are not offended when your Scriptures bestow the title of *Elohim* upon civil magistrates merely, much less is there reason to be angry when I, whom God hath distinguished from all others, made preeminent above them, and sent into the world on the designs of mercy, should call myself the *Son of God*. Verse 37: If I prove not the truth of these assertions by miracles, then disbelieve them. Verse 38: But if I do, believe the proof that may be drawn from my miracles, *that the Father is in me, and I in him.*" Now, wherein did Jesus explain away any thing which he had before said? The expression *that the Father is in him, and he in the Father*, I do not understand as asserting his divine

nature in a direct manner. It is a phrase which is used to express the idea that any one is (*conjunctissimus Deo*) *most nearly and affectionately united with God*. (See 1 John iv. 16, where it is applied to Christians; also verses 12 and 13.)

In the whole passage it appears plain to me, that Jesus has not asserted any thing which could not be predicated of himself as sustaining the office of Messiah. He had called God *his Father*, and, as the Jews supposed, or seem to have supposed, in a peculiar and appropriate sense. But it did not follow, that by using this term he meant to assert his divine nature. Rather the contrary appears. “Say ye of him whom the Father *hath sanctified and sent into the world*,” *i. e.* the Son of God, &c. Jesus does not undertake, then, to answer the question here whether he is truly divine, but simply to vindicate the language he had used against the accusations of the Jews. “If your magistrates are called *Elohim*, is it presumption in me to call myself the *Son of God*?” This leaves the question unagitated as to his divine nature, but vindicates the language which he had used against the malignant aspersions of the Jews, by an argument drawn from their own Scriptures.

It shows, indeed, that the term “Son of God” does not *appropriately* designate Christ as divine, but as the incarnate Mediator—as him *whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world*. Did the Father *sanctify and send into the world* his *Son* as GOD, who is infinitely perfect and immutable? As Mediator, as Messiah, Christ

was sent into the world—as *Son* he filled, and acted in a subordinate capacity : how, then, can his being *Son* prove him to be divine? *Son of God* indeed, by usage, has become a kind of *proper name*; and, in this view, designates occasionally a distinction in the Godhead, which I believe to be eternal. In this manner we very commonly use the term now; and in this way the Apostles sometimes use it. (See Heb. i. 1—3.) But this is, in Scripture, only an *occasional* and *secondary* use of it. *Commonly* and *appropriately*, it designates the incarnate Messiah as born in a manner supernatural, (Luke i. 35, comp. iii. 38.) as the special object of divine love, (Matt. xvii. 5; Col. i. 13; John ii. 35.) and as exhibiting the best and highest resemblance of the Father, (Col. i. 15; Heb. i. 3; John i. 14: x. 32: xiv. 10). Would theologians keep these ideas in view, I cannot help thinking they might be able to understand each other better, and to reason more conclusively.

I have thus summarily touched upon the principal texts which are employed by Unitarians to oppose the doctrines which I have been endeavouring to defend. Whether I have violated the laws of exegesis in doing this, and whether you or I most depart from them, in explaining the texts which seem to be at variance with the opinions that we defend, must be left to the judgment of the intelligent reader.

I must observe, however, before I close this Letter, which concludes what I have at present to advance in respect to your sermon, that I do not

omit making observations on the rest of the sermon, because I accede to many things which you profess to believe, or to the mode in which you have represented the sentiments of Trinitarians, in regard to various topics. I might mention the manner in which you accuse us of treating the moral attributes of God; your appropriating to yourself and your party, by implication, the exclusive belief in all that is amiable and excellent in the Deity, (pp. 15—18); your assertion that the reproaches which you are obliged to encounter are occasioned chiefly by your zeal to vindicate the dishonoured goodness and rectitude of God, (p. 18); the manner in which you state our views of the atonement, and by implication appropriate to Unitarians only many important things in which we all agree (pp. 18—21); the appropriation also to Unitarians only, in a similar way, of many views respecting the love of God, rational zeal in religion and the benevolent virtues; and the intimations that we are opposed to all that is excellent, and rational, and worthy of belief. The manner in which you have treated these topics, I do very much regret; and I cannot think that this is the way to convince opponents, or to terminate disputes. If I have attempted to hold up you, or Unitarians, to ridicule—if I have misrepresented your sentiments—made any effort to use the *argumentum ad invidiam*—appealed to human authorities to decide the question between us—or appealed to any thing but the sober rules of exegesis—then I desire to know it, and be humbled for it. I will



not say that I have not transgressed in any of these particulars ; for who that knows the human heart does not know that it is deceitful ? But, I can say sincerely, I did not mean to transgress ; and that I will, with all my heart, thank the man who, in the spirit of Christian love, will point out my error, and show me wherein I have written in such a way as to endanger or render repulsive the cause which I am advocating. That cause I believe to be just ; and I should regret to employ any unfairness to defend it. What real interest have we but to know the truth ? And what but simple argument can lead us to it ?

I retire, then, from the field of review which the remainder of your sermon presents ; for, since the pressure of my official duties, that cannot be abandoned or neglected, is so great, I am compelled to relinquish the idea, which I at first entertained, of pursuing the investigation of the topics presented by the remainder of your sermon.

I have but a few considerations to add, on the subject of the preceding pages, which must be reserved for another Letter.

## LETTER V.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

IN page 14 of your sermon, you inform us of the method in which you explain those passages which seem to speak of the divine nature of Christ. The paragraph is as follows :

“ I am aware that these remarks will be met by two or three texts, in which Christ is called God, and by a class of passages, not very numerous, in which divine properties are said to be ascribed to him. To these we offer one plain answer. We say, that it is one of the most established and obvious principles of criticism, that language is to be explained according to the known properties of the subject to which it is applied. Every man knows, that the same words convey very different ideas when used in relation to different beings. Thus, Solomon *built* the temple in a different manner from the architect whom he employed; and God *repents* differently from man. Now we maintain, that the known properties and circumstances of Christ, his birth, sufferings, and death, his constant habit of speaking of God as a distinct being from himself, his praying to God, his ascribing to God all his power and offices,—these acknowledged properties of Christ, we say, oblige us to interpret the comparatively few passages, which are thought to make him the supreme God, in a manner consistent with

his distinct and inferior nature. Is it our duty to explain such texts by the rule which we apply to other texts, in which human beings are called gods, and are said to be partakers of the divine nature, to know and possess all things, and to be filled with all God's fulness? These latter passages we do not hesitate to modify, and restrain, and turn from the most obvious sense, because this sense is opposed to the known properties of the beings to whom they relate; and we maintain that we adhere to the same principle, and use no greater latitude, in explaining, as we do, the passages which are thought to support the Godhead of Christ."

I must *hesitate*, however, to adopt this principle, without examining its nature and tendency. On the supposition that you admit the Bible to be a revelation from God, as you aver, permit me to ask, whether it is the object of a revelation to disclose truths which *are NOT known*, or are insufficiently established; or whether it is the object of a revelation to disclose truths *already known* and established? If you answer, The latter, then your answer denies, of course, that it is a *revelation*. What the book of nature exhibits, the Scriptures do not *reveal*. Is there, then, any thing in the Scriptures, which the book of nature does not exhibit? If you concede this, then I ask, How are we, on your ground, to obtain any notion of that thing which was *unknown* before it was *revealed*?—e. g. the resurrection of the body is revealed. Now it is a *known* property of the human body to corrupt and perish. Shall I construe a passage of Scripture, then, in such a manner as to contradict this *known* property? If not, then I can never suppose the resurrection of the body to be revealed. I, however, do construe the

Scriptures so as to contradict this apparently known property of the human body—following the obvious assertion of the sacred writers, and not allowing myself to force a constructive meaning upon their language. Yet, if I understand you, I am at liberty “to restrain and modify, and turn the words from their most obvious sense,” because this sense is opposed to the known properties of the matter of which our bodies are composed.

The case is just the same, in regard to any other fact or doctrine. What I know already of a thing is, if you are correct, “to modify and restrain, and turn from their obvious sense,” the words which are employed in revealing it, because what is revealed, I suppose to be at variance with some *known* doctrines or properties. Is there not room here for great caution, and great doubt as to the correctness of your principle?

According to this principle, moreover, the Scriptures may be construed very differently by persons of different degrees of knowledge. One man knows the properties of things far more extensively than his neighbour. He sees that what is revealed may consist with *known properties* of things; but his neighbour, who lacks this knowledge, is unable to perceive the consistency of revelation with what he knows; and this, because his knowledge does not qualify him to judge, or because what he thinks he knows, he is really ignorant of. The same text in the Bible, therefore, may be received by one as a consistent part

of revelation, and rejected by the other. The measure of a man's knowledge, consequently, cannot be a proper test by which the meaning of Scripture is to be proved.

But you will say, "I can never believe in the reality of a revelation which contradicts my reason." I accede. And here is the very place where I find the greatest difficulty with your theory of interpretation. You do not seem to me to carry your objections back to the proper place. If *God manifest in the flesh* be an absurdity—a palpable contradiction—"an enormous tax upon human credulity," as you aver—then the claims of the book which asserts this are no doubt to be disregarded. What is palpable contradiction, we certainly can never believe.

But, in determining what the Scriptures have taught, we have no right to say, that because any particular doctrine is repugnant to our views, therefore we will "modify and restrain, and turn from the obvious sense," the words in which it is conveyed. The rules of exegesis are not a mass of wax, which can be moulded at pleasure into any shape that we may fancy. We do as great violence to reason—to the first principles of all reasoning—when we reject these rules, as when we admit absurdities to be true.

In case an obscure term is used, I acknowledge that clear passages relating to the same subject are to be adduced to ascertain its meaning. If Christ had been simply called *God*, I should allow that this term *might* be explained by its use as



applied to inferior beings: but when the sacred writers themselves have explained the meaning which they attach to it, by telling us that Christ is the God who created and governs the world—who is omniscient and eternal—the object of religious worship and prayer—God over all, or supreme God (not to mention “the true God,” and the “great God”)—there is no law of exegesis, no method of interpretation, which can obscure their meaning, that is not violence—an infringement of the fundamental principles of interpretation, and therefore an abandonment of the first principles of our reason. It does appear to me, therefore, that my only resort in such a case is, to reject their authority, if I disbelieve the doctrine. To say that they did not mean to teach what they most obviously have taught, I *cannot—must not*—no book can be understood—no writer can be interpreted at all, by such a rule of exegesis, without forcing upon him the opinions of his readers. My system of philosophy, we will say, differs from yours. What you view to be a palpable contradiction and absurdity, I view as rational and consistent. This, we know, is not an uncommon fact. In reading a book, then, that respects the subject of our differing opinions, you hold yourselves bound to construe it, so as to save all that appears to you contradictory or absurd: I interpret it just as its language obviously means, by the common laws of exegesis, which do not depend on my philosophy. This book, then, may have two different meanings, according to us, in

the same passages. Is it so? *Can it be?* Or rather, are not the laws of interpretation independent of you or me? If not, how can the meaning of any writer be ever obtained?

You and I differ as to what John has taught in the first chapter of his gospel. I commence reading him with the full conviction, that I cannot determine *à priori*, in all respects, what the nature of God and Christ is, and with the belief that John wrote what is a revelation from heaven. I read John, and interpret him just as I do any other author, ancient or modern, by the general rules of exegesis, modified by the special circumstances and dialect in which he wrote. I am as well satisfied that he meant to assert the truly divine nature of the *Logos*, as I am that he has made any assertion at all. I receive this assertion, therefore, as declaring a fact which I ought to believe, and which, if I admit his inspiration, I must believe. In the same manner I treat all other passages which respect this subject. I come in this way to the conclusion, that Christ is truly divine—that he has a human and divine nature so united, (I undertake not to tell in what manner,) that he speaks of either nature as himself. The passages which seem to imply his inferiority to God, I find to be capable of explanation without contradiction, or doing violence to the language, by the obvious fact that he has two natures united, which the sacred writers seem to me so plainly to inculcate. In this way, I find one consistent whole. I save the laws of exegesis. I admit,

indeed, on the authority of revelation, doctrines which natural religion never taught; but *why should not a revelation teach something which natural religion did not?*

Here, then, I take my stand. *I abide by the simple declarations of the New Testament writers, interpreted by the common laws of language.* My views reconcile all the seeming discrepancies of description in regard to Christ, without doing violence to the language of any. I can believe, and do believe, that the sacred writers are consistent, without any explanation but such as the laws of interpretation admit and require.

On the other hand, when you read the first of John, you say, The known properties of Christ must modify the description. How, then, are those properties *known*? By the same writer—the same authority—the same revelation. But what can give to one part of St. John's book any more credit than to the other part? You will say you can understand better how Christ can be inferior to God, than how he can be divine. Granting this might be the case, is a revelation merely to teach us things which are obvious? or may it disclose those which are most difficult, and cannot be discovered by unassisted reason? If the latter, how can you aver that Christ may not be revealed as a divine person? To show *à priori* that this is impossible or absurd, is really out of the question. The religion of nature teaches nothing for or against this fact. The simple question then is, What has John said?—Not what your philosophy

may lead you to regard as probable or improbable. And I must be allowed to say again, if John has not taught us that Christ is truly divine, I am utterly unable, by the laws of exegesis, to make out that he has asserted any thing in his whole gospel.

If I believed, then, as you do, that a Saviour with a human and divine nature, is "an enormous tax on human credulity," I should certainly reject the authority of John. To violate the laws of exegesis, in order to save his credit, I could regard, with my present views, as nothing more than striving to keep up a fictitious belief in divine revelation. It is what I cannot do, and what no man ought to do. It would be impossible for me, with your views, to hesitate at all about giving up entirely the old idea of the divine inspiration and authority of the sacred books. How can they be divine if they teach palpable absurdities? And that they do teach what you call palpable absurdities, I feel quite satisfied can be amply proved from the simple application of the laws of interpretation.

You have, however, undertaken to vindicate your method of construing the Scriptures, by intimating the necessity of interpreting several seemingly unlimited assertions, in respect to *Christians*, in the same way as you do many in respect to Christ. "Recollect," you say, "the unqualified manner in which it is said of Christians, that they possess all things, know all things, and do all things." And again, in order to show how we may "modify and restrain, and turn from the

obvious sense," the passages that respect the divinity of Christ, you say, "It is our duty to explain such texts by the rule which we apply to other texts, in which human beings are called gods, and are said to be partakers of the divine nature, to know and possess all things, and to be filled with all God's fulness."

I have already examined the manner in which the Bible calls men *gods*. There is and can be no mistake here; for, instead of attributing to them divine attributes, it always accompanies the appellations with such adjuncts as guard against mistake. It does not call any man *God*; and then add, that the *God* is meant who is the Creator of the universe.

Nor does the New Testament anywhere call *men God*. Will you produce the instance, unless it be in the case of Christ, which is the case in question? But that the appellation here is bestowed under circumstances totally diverse from those in which it is applied to men in the Old Testament, is a fact too obvious to need farther explanation. The Hebrew word *Elohim* had plainly a latitude more extensive, *i. e.* it was capable of a greater variety of use than the Greek word  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  (*Theos*, God). Can you produce from Greek Scripture, *i. e.* the New Testament, an instance where  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  is applied to any *man* whatever?

In regard to the assertion, "that Christians are made partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4), a mistake about the meaning is scarcely possible. "Whereby (*i. e.* by the gospel) are given unto us,"



says the Apostle, "exceeding great and precious promises, that BY THESE ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*." But how? He answers this question. "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." That is, by moral purification you will become assimilated to God, or partakers of that holy nature which he possesses. Does the context here afford any ground for mistake?

In 1 John ii. 20, Christians are said to have "an unction from the Holy One, and *to know all things*." In the preceding verse, the Apostle had been describing apostates who forsook the Christian cause, because they were not sincerely attached to it. The case of real Christians, who have an unction from the Holy One, is different. They "know all things." And what means this? The sequel explains it. "I have not written unto you," <sup>1</sup> says he, "because *ye know not the truth*; but because *ye know it*, and that no lie is of the truth." To "know all things," then, plainly means here, to know all that pertains to Christian doctrine and duty, so as to persevere, and not to apostatize from the truth, as others had done.

Is this, however, asserting, (as you affirm in your Sermon,) in "*an unqualified manner*, that Christians know all things?"

In John xiv. 26, the Holy Ghost is promised to the Apostles "*to teach them all things*, and to bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said unto them." Again, (John xvi. 23,) the "Spirit of Truth" is promised to guide

<sup>1</sup> JOHN WOULD HAVE NO NEED TO  
WRITE THEM IF THEY WERE  
OMNISCIENT

the disciples "*into all truth*;" and in 1 John ii. 27, the anointing which Christians have received, is said to "teach them all things." In all these cases, the context leaves no room to doubt that "all things essential to Christian doctrine and practice" is meant. No person, I presume, ever understood these passages as meaning that the Apostles or Christians should be endowed with omniscience.

Yet in the other case, where Christ is asserted to be *God*, the context is such, that the great body of Christians, in every age, have understood the sacred writers as asserting that he was truly divine. Is there no difference between the two cases? You make them indeed the same, in respect to the principle of interpretation. To my mind, the difference is this,—that, in the one case, the adjuncts *prevent* you from ascribing omniscience to Christians; in the other, they *lead you necessarily to ascribe divine properties to Christ*, unless you "turn their meaning from the obvious sense," so far as to transgress the fundamental maxims of interpreting language."

In 1 Cor. iii. 22, the Apostle says to the Corinthian churches, "All things are yours;" and the same Apostle speaks of himself (2 Cor. vi. 10) as "having nothing, yet *possessing all things*." In the first case, the context adds, "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all are yours, and ye are Christ's,"—*i. e.* simply (when the phraseology is construed as elsewhere,) let no

man glory in this or that particular teacher; all teachers belong to the church; and all things in the present and future world will minister to the good of the church. Why should you covet exclusive individual possessions, when you have an interest in the whole? Refrain, therefore, from the spirit of jealousy and contention.

The second case is merely antithesis. The Apostle evidently asserts (compare the context,) that although he has little indeed of this world's good, yet he possesses a far more excellent and satisfactory good, in comparison of which all else is nothing. In the same sense, we every day speak of a man's *all*,—meaning that which he most desires and loves best.

I can no more see here, than in the other instances already discussed, why you should affirm that Christians are said, “in an *unqualified* manner, to possess all things.”

One expression still remains. In Eph. iii. 19, the Apostle exhibits his fervent wishes that the Christians of Ephesus might “be filled with all the fulness of God.” By comparing this expression, as applied to Christ in Col. i. 19, ii. 9, with John i. 14, 16, and Eph. i. 23, it appears evident, that, by the *fulness of God*, is meant the abundant gifts and graces which were bestowed on Christ, and through him upon his disciples, (John i. 16; Eph. i. 23). When Paul prays, therefore, that the church at Ephesus might be “filled with the fulness of God,” he prays simply that they might be abundantly replenished with the gifts and

graces peculiar to the Christian religion. But how does such an affirmation concern the principle of exegesis in question?

I am well satisfied, that the course of reasoning in which you have embarked, and the principle now in question, by which you explain away the divinity of the Saviour, must lead most men who approve of them, eventually to the conclusion that the Bible is not of divine origin, and does not oblige us to belief or obedience. I do not aver that they will lead you there. You have more serious views of the importance of religion than many, perhaps, of those who speculate with you. Consistency with your present views will afford strong inducement not to give up the divine authority of the Scriptures. But are there not some who embrace Unitarian sentiments, that have no inconsistency to fear by adopting such an opinion? Deeming what you have publicly taught them to be true,—viz. that it is “no crime to believe with Mr. Belsham,” who declares that the *Scriptures are not the word of God*; feeling the inconsistency (as I am certain some of them will and do feel it) of violating the rules of interpretation, in order to make the Apostles speak as in their apprehension they ought to speak, and unable to reconcile what the Apostles say with their own views,—will it not be natural to throw off the restraints which the old ideas of the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures impose upon them, and receive them simply on the ground on which

they place any other writings of a moral and religious nature?

I make no pretensions to uncommon foresight in regard to this subject. I certainly do not say these things with invidious designs, and for the sake of kindling the fire of contention. Very far from it. On the contrary, I fear that the parties now contending here will not cease to contend, until this ground be openly taken. For myself, I regard it as more desirable, in many points of view, that the authority of the Scripture should at once be cast off, and its claims to divine inspiration rejected, than that such rules of exegesis should be introduced, as to make the Scripture speak, against their obvious meaning, whatever any party may desire. Avowed unbelief in the divine authority of the Scriptures can never continue long, as I would fain believe, in the present day of light and examination. Such a state of things may pass away with the generation who act in it: but it is a more difficult matter to purge away the stain which Christianity may contract by violated laws of interpretation. Those who do thus violate these laws, may obtain and hold, for a long time, great influence over the mass of people who are not accustomed to examine, in a critical manner, the nicer points of theology. If opponents to this method of interpretation lift up the voice of warning, they may not be heard. They are liable to the imputation of bigotry, or illiberality, or ignorance. But when men professedly cast off their respect to the authority of the Scriptures, the case



becomes different, and the great body of plain and sober people will revolt.

In making these observations on the nature and probable consequences of that exegesis which explains away the deity of Christ, I cannot think that I am building castles in the air to amuse my own imagination. For ten years past, I have been called every week to duties which necessitated me to be conversant with the history of interpretation, as it has appeared in Germany—a country which, in half a century, has produced more works on criticism and sacred literature than the world contains besides. About fifty years since, Semler, professor of Divinity at Halle, began to lecture and publish on the subject of interpretation, in a manner that excited the attention of the whole German empire. The grand principle by which he explained away whatever he did not think proper to believe, was that which has been called *accommodation*. He maintained that the Apostles and the Saviour often admitted representations and doctrines into their instructions, which were calculated merely for the purpose of persuading the Jews, being *accommodated* to their prejudices; but which were not intended to be a real directory of sentiment. In this way, whatever was inconsistent with his own views, he called *accommodation*; and thus, at once, expunged it from the list of Christian doctrines.

Semler's original genius and great learning soon gave currency to his views in Germany, where a system of theology and exegesis had prevailed,

which, in not a few respects, needed reformation. Since his time a host of writers (many of them with exalted talents and most extensive erudition) have arisen, who have examined, explained, modified, and defended the doctrine of *accommodation*. The more recent method of exegesis, however, in Germany, has been to solve all the miraculous facts related in the Bible, by considerations which are affirmed to be drawn from the idiom and <sup>1</sup>ignorance of antiquity in general, and in particular of the sacred writers themselves. Thus, with Eichhorn, the account of the creation and fall of man is merely a poetical, philosophical speculation, of some ingenious person, on the origin of the world and of evil.\* So in regard to the offering up of Isaac by Abraham, he says, "The Godhead could not have required of Abraham so horrible a crime; and there can be no justification, palliation, or excuse, for this pretended command of the Divinity." He then explains it. "Abraham *dreamed* that he must offer up Isaac; and, according to the superstition of the times, regarded it as a divine admonition. He prepared to execute the mandate which his dream had conveyed to him. A lucky accident (probably the rustling of a ram who was entangled in the bushes) hindered it; and this, according to ancient idiom, was also the voice of the Divinity."†

The same writer represents the history of the Mosaic legislation, at Mount Sinai, in a curious

\* Urgeschichte, *passim*.

† Bibliothek. band i. s. 45, &c.

<sup>1</sup> THIS VIEW SAYS BIBLE AUTHORS SPOKE NOT BY WAY OF ACCOMMODATION BUT PLAIN IGNORANCE

manner. Moses ascended to the top of Sinai and built a fire there—(how he found wood on this barren rock, or raised it to the top, Eichhorn does not tell us)—a fire consecrated to the worship of God, before which he prayed. Here an unexpected and tremendous thunder-storm occurred. He seized the occasion to proclaim the laws which he had composed in his retirement as the statutes of Jehovah,—leading the people to believe that Jehovah had conversed with him. Not that he was a deceiver, but he really believed that the occurrence of such a thunder-storm was a sufficient proof of the fact that Jehovah had spoken to him, or sanctioned the work in which he had been engaged.\* The prophecies of the Old Testament are, according to him, patriotic wishes, expressed with all the fire and elegance of poetry, for the future prosperity and a future deliverer of the Jewish nation.†

In like manner, C. F. Ammon, professor of Theology at Erlangen, tells us, in respect to the miracle of Christ's walking on the water, that "to walk on the sea, is not to stand on the waves, as on the solid ground, as Jerome *dreams*, but to walk through the waves so far as the shoals reached, and then to swim."‡ So in regard to the miracle of the loaves and fishes, (Matt. xiv. 15,) he says that Jesus probably distributed some loaves and fishes which he had to those who were around

\* Bibliothek. band i. theil. 1, s. 76, &c.

† Propheten, Bibliothek, Einleit, *passim*.

‡ Pref. to edit. of Ernesti Inst. Interpret. p. 12.

him, and thus excited, by his example, others among the multitude who had provisions to distribute them in like manner.\*

Thiess, in his commentary on the Acts, explains the miraculous effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii.) in the following manner. "It is not uncommon," says he, "in those countries for a violent gust of wind to strike on a particular spot or house. Such a gust is commonly accompanied by the electric fluid, and the sparks of this are scattered all around. These float about the chamber, become apparent, and light upon the disciples. They kindle into enthusiasm at this; and believe the promise of their Master is now to be performed. This enthusiasm spectators assemble to witness; and, instead of preaching as before in Hebrew, each one uses his own native tongue to proclaim his feelings."

I have not followed the words through the whole, but have given the substance of Thiess's views in my two last sentences. Such was the outpouring of the Spirit, and such the gift of tongues.

The same Thiess represents the miraculous cure, by Peter, of the man who was lame from his birth, in a very singular way. "This man," says he, "was lame only according to report. He never walked any; so the people believed he could not walk . . . . Peter and John, being more sagacious, however, *threatened* him. 'In the name of the

\* p. 16.

Messiah,' said they, 'stand up.' The word *Messiah* had a magical power. He stood up. Now, one saw that he could walk. To prevent the compassion of men from being turned into rage (at his deceit), he chose the most sagacious party, and connected himself with the apostles."\*

The case of Ananias falling down dead, is thus represented by the same writer. "Ananias fell down terrified; but probably he was carried out and buried, while still alive."

Heinrichs, however, who produces this comment of Thiess, relates another mode of explaining the occurrence in question,—viz. that *Peter stabbed Ananias*; "which," says Heinrichs, "does not at all disagree with the vehement and easily exasperated temper of Peter."†

Numerous systems of Hermeneutica, *i. e.* the art of Interpretation, have been written and published in Germany, on this plan. Meyer, in a very laboured system of Hermeneutica of the Old Testament, in two large octavos, has a body of rules by which every thing miraculous is to be explained away. He concedes that there is the same objection to admitting any one miracle, as to admitting all. He therefore rejects the whole. So Bauer, in his Hermeneutica; and a multitude of others.

In the course of the discussions which these principles have excited in Germany, the question about Christ's divinity has been entirely forgotten. When the contest first began, this point, among

\* Comm. on chap. iii.

† Nov. Test. Koppianum, Vol. iii. Partic. ii. pp. 355—357, &c.



others, was warmly contested. But the fundamental questions, whether the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and whether the doctrine of *accommodation* can be used in all its latitude, in interpreting them, soon take the place of this. *Accommodation* has been sifted, attacked, defended, explained, moderated, modified, itself *accommodated*; so that at last it is nearly driven from the ground, and the plain and simple rules of grammatical interpretation are triumphant among the best part of the German critics.

In the mean time, they have not returned to the principles of their Lutheran Symbol. Very far from it. While many of them allow that John, and Peter, and Paul, did believe and teach the doctrine of Christ's divinity and of the atonement, they hold themselves under no obligation to receive them. De Wette, who has recently published a *System of Theology*, and is Professor of the same at the University of Berlin, maintains that the Pentateuch was composed about the time of the Captivity; that the Jewish ritual was of gradual formation, accessions being made to it by superstition; and that the Book of Chronicles (which is filled with scraps and inconsistencies) was foisted into the canon by some of the priesthood, who wished to exalt their own order. His *Beiträge*, which contained these sentiments, was published before the death of Griesbach, and came out recommended by him; who says, "If you object to the young literary adventurer (De Wette), that he has endeavoured to bring Judaism into dis-

repute, my answer is, This is no more than Paul himself has laboured to do.”\*

In his book on the atonement of Christ (*De Morte Christi expiatoriâ*,) he represents Christ as disappointed that the Jews would not hearken to him as a moral teacher simply; which was the first character he assumed. Christ then assumed the character of a prophet, and asserted his divine mission, in order that the Jews might be induced to listen to him. Finding that they would not do this, and that they were determined to destroy him, in order not to lose the whole object of his mission, and to convert necessity into an occasion of giving himself credit, he gave out that his death itself would be *expiatory*.

Yet De Wette holds a most exalted rank in Germany. I doubt whether Germany can boast of an oriental scholar, or a literary man, who has more admirers than De Wette.

What shall we say now of De Wette? That he is not a Christian? He would look with astonishment on any man who would think of such an accusation, and tax him with a degree of illiberality and superstition.

You are doubtless inclined, before this time, to say, “What is all this to us? We do not avow or defend such opinions.” True, I answer,—at present you do not. A short time since, *they* did not: but as soon as their numbers increased, so that they began to be fearless of consequences, and

\* Preface to *Beiträge*.

their antagonists urged the laws of exegesis upon them, they abandoned the ground of defending the divine authenticity of the Bible at once. A few years since, the state of theological questions in Germany, in many respects, was similar to what it now is here. At present, the leading German critics (rejecting *accommodation*, and casting off all ideas of the divine origin of the Scriptures,) are disputing with great zeal the questions, Whether a miracle be possible. Whether God and nature are one and the same thing. (Schelling, a *divine*, is at the head of a great party which maintains that they are the same.) And whether the Jews ever expected any Messiah. Some time ago, many of their critics maintained that no Messiah was predicted in the Old Testament; but now, they question even whether the Jews had any expectation of one. It would seem now, that they have come nearly to the end of questions on *theology*—at least I cannot well devise what is to come next.

It does seem to me, that it needs only a thorough acquaintance with German reasoners and critics (a thing which is fast coming in,) to induce young men to go with them, who set out with the maxim, that “to believe with Mr. Belsham is no crime.” No man can read these writers without finding a great deal of excellent matter in them, well arranged, and of real utility. I venture to add, that no man can study them thoroughly, and afterwards take up Priestley, Belsham, Carpenter, Yates, Lindsay, or other recent English Unitarian writers, as *critics*, with any pleasure. I ought, perhaps, to except

Cappe, who appears to have studied diligently his Bible. He was evidently a lover of Biblical study. But the incomparably greater acquisitions of the German critics, in every department of study, spread a charm over their writing, for the lover of discussion and literature, that is not often found in productions of this nature. I must add, that, much as I differ in sentiment from them, *and fundamentally subversive of Christianity* as I believe their views to be, I am under great obligations to them for the instructions they have given me ; and specially for affording me so much satisfaction, that we need nothing more than the simple rules of exegesis, and a candid believing heart, to see in the Scriptures, with overpowering evidence, all the substantial and important doctrines which have commonly been denominated *orthodox*.

Such had been the impression on me from reading German writers ; and, with such impressions, I can never regret the time that I have spent in studying them. Abler advocates than they for the fashionable philosophy of the day, which is endeavouring to explain away the peculiar doctrines of the Scriptures, I do not expect to find.

Able, however, as they are, my mind returns from the study of them with an impression more deep, radical, and satisfactory, than ever before, that the doctrines commonly denominated *evangelical* or *orthodox*, are the doctrines of the Scriptures, and are the truth of God. My views as to the exegesis of particular texts, in some cases, have been changed by the study of philology and inter-

pretation. I should not rely for the proof of doctrines now, on some texts which I once thought contained such proof. But my impressions of the real truth and importance of evangelical doctrines, I can truly say, are greatly strengthened.

Before you pronounce sentence upon the German expositors and critics, to whom I have referred above, I trust you will give them a hearing. I should rejoice to find that you are engaged in the study of them: for a mind capable of reasoning and thinking as yours, must necessarily, as it seems to me, come to the same conclusions with Eichhorn, and Paulus, and Henke, and Eckermann, and Herder, and other distinguished men of the new German school; or embrace with us the sentiments which are commonly denominated orthodox. I cannot refrain from adding, that I do most earnestly hope and pray for the latter.

You may be ready perhaps to express your surprise, that I should commend the study of such writers as those whom I have quoted. I am well aware, indeed, that the serious mind revolts at the glaring impiety of such comments as those which I have produced: but, after all, if a man were to judge and condemn these very writers by a few selections of this nature, it would be hasty. On points which are not concerned with the special doctrines of Christianity—in illustrating critical and literary history, philology, natural history, and grammatical exegesis—in a word, every thing literary or scientific that pertains to the Bible—who can enter into competition with recent German



writers? But it should be understood, that there are writers on these subjects in Germany, who are what is denominated *orthodox*, as well as those of a different character, such as I have just mentioned. The lover of acute, thorough-going, radical discussion, will lose much, if he does not cultivate an acquaintance with both these classes of writers.

I know, indeed, that you are an advocate for unlimited research. For myself, I have long practised upon this principle: and I cannot but think the cautious fears of many of those with whom I agree in sentiment, in respect to the limits of study, though honourable to the spirit of piety which they cherish, and indicative of real interest and concern for the prosperity of the Church, are not well founded. The fundamental principle of Protestantism is, that the *Bible is the only rule of faith and practice*. To know what the Bible teaches, then, is the great object of all religious knowledge. To understand this, (as to acquire every thing else,) study and diligence are necessary. Men are not inspired now, as the Apostles and primitive Christians were, to understand all truth. Men are imperfect, and have imperfect knowledge. No one sect, party, or body of men, can claim absolute perfection of knowledge or virtue. And as a great many points of inquiry (interesting and important ones too) may be managed by men of sobriety, in the use of only their natural intellect and their resources of learning, the man who loves the Book of God, and desires the most extensive acquaintance with it which he can possibly make,

will not neglect their works, nor any other source of knowledge within his power. It was a noble maxim of a heathen, "*Fas est et ab hoste doceri;*" *We may receive instruction from an enemy.* Christians too often forget this, and permit antipathy to particular sentiments to exclude them from all the profit which might be derived from a more enlarged acquaintance with the writings of opponents. Believing, as I do, that many, who are arrayed against the sentiments that I espouse, are not destitute of sense, or of learning, and are not to be despised, I am inclined always to see how they vindicate their cause. If I am not convinced by *their* arguments, I am rendered better satisfied with *my own*, and more able to defend by such an investigation. But if I could not practise upon the noble maxim, "*We may receive instruction from an enemy,*" I would at least apply another one to vindicate the study of the German writers, and justify myself for even recommending it in proper cases. I would say (as was said in a different connexion and for a different object,) "*Egyptii sunt, spoliemus;*" *They are Egyptians, let us take their spoils.* Shall I not accept the good which they proffer me—and proffer me in a more scientific manner, and well digested, lucid, established form, than I can elsewhere find? Without hesitation, I answer, yes.

I cannot help viewing the subject in another light. Every student in theology, every Christian minister, ought to be established in the truth, and able to "*convince gainsayers.*" How can he do

this, *if he does not know what these gainsayers allege?* Is he to engage in war against the foes of truth, without knowing the weapons by which his enemies are to assail him? It is a mistaken system of education indeed, which teaches him thus—which thrusts out a young man upon the Church, unacquainted with the nature of his enemies' assaults, and liable, of course, to become the victim of the first powerful attack that is made upon him. Without any doubt, private Christians should have little or nothing to do with all this ground of dispute; but it is a shame for a minister of the gospel, who has the opportunity, not to seize every advantage in his power, to render himself as able as possible to defend the cause which he has espoused.

I may venture to add a better authority still, to confirm these reasonings. An inspired Apostle has directed Christians to "*prove all things;*" but to "*hold fast that which is good.*" How does he comply with the spirit of this direction, who never examines any views that differ from his own; but settles down with the full conviction that he is right, and that all who differ from him are wrong? As no man now is inspired, and no man, therefore, is free from some error, does it not become those who are to be "set for the defence of the truth," to examine, as far as it may be in their power, the dissentient views of others who have called themselves Christians, and who lay claim to an understanding of the Word of God? Such an examination will enlarge their views, and

render them more able to oppose error and defend truth.

Such are my reasons for pursuing the study of German writers, and commending the study of them. Truth has nothing to fear from examination. If the sentiments that I espouse will not stand the test of investigation, then I will abandon them. I never shall willingly embrace any sentiments, except on such a condition. But, in respect to the study of the more *liberal* (so called) German writers, I fear no injury from it, in the end, to the sentiments denominated *evangelical*. Exegesis has come, by discussion among them, to a solid and permanent science. That the scriptural writers taught substantially what we believe to be *orthodoxy*, is now conceded by some of their most able expositors.

There is another point of view in which the subject may be regarded. The person who reads their works will see what the spirit of doubt and unbelief can do in respect to the Book of God, and where it will carry the men who entertain it. It is indeed a most affecting and awful lesson. But is there no reason to fear that we are to learn it by sad experience? Does not the progress of the sentiments which you defend illustrate the nature of this subject? A short time since almost all the Unitarians of New England were simple Arians. Now, if I am correctly informed, there are scarcely any of the younger preachers of Unitarian sentiments who are not simple *Humanitarians*. Such was the case in Germany. The divinity of Christ

was early assailed ; inspiration was next doubted and impugned. Is not this already begun here ? Natural religion comes next in order ; and the question between the parties here may soon be in substance whether *natural* or *revealed* religion is our guide and our hope.

For myself I must say it is my conviction, that the sooner matters come to this issue the better. Not that natural religion is better in itself than Unitarianism. No. I believe Christianity, under any form, is better than Deism. But the contest which is now carried on here, will be more speedily terminated by such an issue. The parties will then understand each other ; and the public will understand the subject of dispute. I cannot think that they do at present. It is but very recently that explicit declarations have been made in print by you and your friends. And though, with such views as I possess, I cannot help feeling the most sincere regret that such sentiments should be propagated, yet I can never do otherwise than applaud that ingenuousness which openly avows sentiments that are more privately inculcated. I shall be very ready to confess my apprehensions are quite erroneous, if the lapse of a few years more does not produce, in many cases, the undisguised avowal of the German divinity in all its latitude. I anticipate this, because I believe that the laws of exegesis, when thoroughly understood, and applied without party bias, will necessarily lead men to believe that the Apostles inculcated, for substance, those doctrines which are now called *orthodox*.



And as there will probably be not a few who will reject these doctrines, my apprehension is, that, to take the German ground, will ere long be deemed both ingenuous and expedient.

Believing, however, as I now do, while my convictions remain, I must act agreeably to them. I hope I shall never be guilty of exercising an exclusive or persecuting spirit. But, while my present views last, I cannot look with indifference on the great contest which is pending in this part of our country. I must regard the opinions which you have avowed in your Sermon to be fundamentally subversive of what appear to me to be the peculiarities of the Christian system. If the doctrine of Christ's divinity and humanity be not true, nor that of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and pardon by it; if human nature be not, of itself, entirely destitute of principles of holiness that may fit men for heaven, and does not need special regenerating and sanctifying grace—then I know not what there is in the Christian system, that very much concerns our duty or our interest, which is not taught by the principles of natural religion, nor what there is for which it is our duty to contend. The great question at present between you and me is, What does the Bible teach on the subjects proposed? For our answer to this question, you and I stand accountable to the Judge of quick and dead; and, as ministers of his gospel and interpreters of his word, we are placed under an awful responsibility. If either of us violate the reason which God has given us in our inquiries—are led by

partial views, by passion, by prejudice, by thirst for popularity with our friends, or a fear of reproach from those whom we are obliged to consider as opponents—Christ will require from us an account of our conduct. When I think on this, and look back and ask myself whether I have conducted this whole dispute with a view to my account and in the fear of God, I cannot but feel solicitude, lest, through the deceitfulness of the human heart, something may have escaped me which may prove prejudicial, in some way or other, to the promotion of real truth. If you see this, my dear Sir, tell me where and what it is. We have no real interest but to know, believe, and obey the truth. And, supposing truth to be what it now appears to me to be, I cannot believe otherwise than that you are endeavouring to inculcate principles radically subversive of the gospel of Christ. Will you do me the justice to believe that I may have honestly formed such an opinion, without taking my faith from creeds, or grounding it on tradition; and without the spirit that would establish an Inquisition, or lord it over the consciences of men, or treat you with disrespect?

In a word, with those who have the convictions that I possess of the nature and importance of the gospel system, it can never admit of a question, whether they are to make all the opposition in their power (provided it be done in the spirit of Christian candour and benevolence,) to the prevalence of sentiments like yours. I cannot but view the question between us as amounting to this—whether

we shall retain Christianity, or reject all but the name? If I am wrong, may the Lord forgive me, and grant me better views. If you are wrong, my heart's desire and prayer to God is, that the same blessing may be bestowed on you.

Allowing that I and those with whom I act are sincere in our belief, you yourself would say, that we should be justly chargeable with the greatest inconsistency, did we not feel strong desires to resist the innovations that are attempted in many important points of our theology. Permit me to add, that real charity may sometimes attribute strong feelings and a deep interest on this subject, to ardent benevolence towards those who differ from us, and whom we think to be in a dangerous condition, rather than to party zeal, blind credulity, and ignorance, or an exterminating and injurious spirit.

And now—to bring these already protracted Letters to a close—you will permit me respectfully and seriously to solicit that you would look back and review the Sermon which has occasioned these remarks. Have you represented the sentiments of the great body of Christians in this country correctly? Have you produced the real arguments on which they rely? Have you treated them with respect, with gentleness, with tenderness? Has your simple aim been to reason with them, to convince them, and not to hold them up in such an attitude as to excite disgust? I do not ask these questions for the sake of reproach, or to wound your feelings; but I cannot help thinking it a duty

incumbent on you to ask them. Look now, with a Christian eye, on the unhappy and distracted state of the churches in this land, the glory of all lands! When will our contentions cease? When shall we bring a united offering to our common Lord, if men who stand in eminent and responsible stations treat those whom they profess to own as *Christian brethren*, with severity, or in such a manner as to wound their feelings?

My dear Sir, I do think these are things which, when we enter our closets to lift up our souls to God, we are all bound by sacred obligations to consider. I do not bring these as charges against you; but I speak of the impressions which your discourse has excited in the bosoms of those who espouse the sentiments which you condemn. If their impressions are without reason, the wrong may indeed fall upon them. But, in reviewing the manner in which you have treated some subjects in your Sermon, is there not more reason for those impressions than Christian meekness and benevolence can approve? When the hours of excitement and the stimulus of party-feeling are gone by, you and I shall stand at the bar of that Saviour who searches the hearts and tries the reins of men. There we shall be obliged to account for the manner in which we have conducted this whole dispute.

O my dear Sir! this is no trifling matter. We are immortal beings; and our eternal destiny is in the hands of that Redeemer about whose dignity and glory we are contending.

When I think on this, I cannot but apprehend that the question between us is of deep and radical interest, as it respects our eternal salvation. If the God whom I am bound to adore has not only revealed himself in the book of nature, but has clearly disclosed his glory in the gospel of Christ, and I mistake after all a revelation so clear,—or, induced by party feeling or erroneous philosophy, reject the testimony which he has given,—the mistake must be tremendous in its consequences—the rejection will justly incur the divine displeasure. With all this subject, however, fully before me, I do not hesitate—I cannot doubt respecting it. When I behold the glory of the Saviour, as revealed in the gospel, I am constrained to cry out with the believing Apostle, “My Lord and my God!” And, when my departing spirit shall quit these mortal scenes, and wing its way to the world unknown, with my latest breath I desire to pray, as the expiring martyr did, “LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT!”





## APPENDIX.

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### TWO PASSAGES ADDED BY PROFESSOR STUART,

*In a late edition of his Letters, are introduced in this form, instead of being inserted in the body of the Work.*

By comparing the preceding paragraph (page 23) with the same in the former editions of this work, the reader will see that some of it is modified, to avoid the ambiguity which seemed to be chargeable upon the former editions; or changed, to correct that which, if literally taken, would be erroneous. I had said, that "the word *person* was introduced into the creeds of ancient times, merely as a term which would express the disagreement of Christians in general with the reputed errors of Sabellius, and others of similar sentiments:" and although I certainly did *not* mean to say that such a use of it was *universal*, and *without exception*, as I well knew the phrase had been variously and loosely used by some of the fathers, yet I prefer to remove the ambiguity of the phrase by a limitation, which, so far as I have been able to examine, seems more accurately to correspond with the state of the case. My belief is,

that the leading and most influential fathers and councils of antiquity did use *person* as I have now stated.

As the text stood in former editions of this work, it would appear as if I meant to say, that the Nicene fathers, in their Symbol, had used the word *person* in the sense alleged. This, however, I did not mean to say,—although it will appear on examination, perhaps, that I might have safely said it. I admit that my expression is of a dubious nature, or even that it will convey the sense which the Reviewer has given to it. I meant to say, that the fathers who belonged to the Nicene Council, the divines of that age, in their writings, used the word *person* to designate a distinction in the Godhead, in opposition to the opinions of Sabellius, and others of like sentiments with him.

The Reviewer, however, in the “Christian Disciple,” in admonishing me of an error in respect to this, has perhaps himself fallen into one. He says that the Nicene Creed contains neither the word *ὑποστασις* nor *προσωπον*; whereas, if he had read the Creed four or five lines beyond what I have quoted, he would have found it anathematizing those “who affirm that the Son is of a different *hypostasis* (*ὑποστασεως*) from the Father.” The sense of *ὑποστασις* here, however, some may incline to think, is not that of *person*, but of *substance* simply. But Basil, and in like manner Bishop Bull, have contended, perhaps triumphantly, for the meaning of *person*.\*

The only question of any importance at issue on the present topic is—Did the ancient fathers use the word *person*, in respect to the Godhead, to designate beings so distinct as to have only a *specific unity*, as the Re-

\* Bulli Op. p. 114, &c.

viewer, after Whitby and others, had asserted? or did they use it to designate a distinction in the Godhead, in opposition to sentiments like those of Sabellius, and with the acknowledgment of the *numerical unity* of the Godhead? The question, of course, is, Did the leading and most influential divines and councils maintain the one or the other of these views? If the former, then my allegation is incorrect; if the latter, then the substance of what I have hitherto said upon this subject has not been disproved.

It were easy to occupy a volume with the discussion of this subject; but my limits necessitate me to be very brief. I begin with an inquiry into the meaning of *ὑπόστασις*.

The Antenicene fathers used this word, perhaps, commonly in the sense of *οὐσία*, *substance* or *essence*. But some used it to signify *person*, or *distinction* in the Godhead. In consequence of the word being differently used by different writers, and in reference to diverse heresies, great disputes arose in the Church about it. At first, the orthodox fathers in general strongly objected to *ὑπόστασις* as applied to designate a distinction in the Godhead, because they averred that it meant *substance* or *essence*; and to assert that there were three substances in the Godhead, they said, was antiscip-tural. Thus Dionysius Romanus (about A.D. 250) repro-bates those "who separate the Divinity into three dif-ferent *hypostases*."\* And again: "They preach as it were three Gods, dividing the sacred Unity into three hypostases, diverse and altogether separate from each other."

\* Advers. Saball., as cited in Athanas. decret. Synod. Nic. p. 320.

So Athanasius says : “ We speak of one hypostasis, —deeming hypostasis and ουσια, *substance*, the *same*.”†

The opposition to hypostasis, in such a sense, was generally in the Latin churches, because they translated both ὑποστασις and ουσια *substantia*, *substance*; and they refused to say that there were *three substances* in the Godhead.

How far Origen, and others of his school, were implicated in the condemnation passed by them upon such a use of hypostasis, does not certainly appear. Origen maintains three hypostases; but, that he asserts them in such a sense as to exclude *numerical unity* of essence and attributes in the Godhead, I have not seen satisfactorily evinced.

After the Sabellian opinions were propagated in the Church, many of the Greek fathers maintained, in opposition to them, that there were three hypostases in the Godhead. Contentions soon arose about this phraseology, because it was deemed by some to imply too much. These contentions were in some measure composed, however, by the Synod of Alexandria, (A.D. 362,) at which Athanasius was present, who decided that “any one was at liberty to aver that there was but one hypostasis in the Godhead, provided the threefold distinction therein was preserved, or to maintain three hypostases, provided that only *one substance* was meant.”†

About this time, in order to avoid the ambiguity of hypostasis, the Greeks began to substitute προσωπον, *person*, in imitation of the Latin *persona*, which was used in the Western churches. The classical use of

\* Epist. ad Antioch.

† Hardouin, tom. i. 734.



both the Greek and Latin word is indeed quite different from the ecclesiastical one. But *προσωπον* and *persona* evidently assumed a technical use in the churches. After the Synod of Alexandria, the Greek Church used both *ὑποστασις* and *προσωπον* in the same sense—as did the Latins *persona* and *hypostasis*—in respect to the subject in question.

It remains now, after having given this sketch of the history of *ὑποστασις* and *προσωπον* in the Greek Church, and *persona* and *hypostasis* in the Latin, to show that a distinction in the Godhead was designated by them, which was deemed consistent with numerical unity of substance and attributes, and was not intended to designate *person* in such a sense as admitted only *specific unity*.

It will of course be seen that this question does not regard the use of *ὑποστασις* in the classic sense of *substance* or *essence*—a sense which some of the fathers gave to it when they affirmed that there could be but one hypostasis in the Godhead; but the use of hypostasis to designate *person* or *distinction* in the Godhead. In a word, when the Greek fathers use hypostasis, or *προσωπον*, for a distinction in the Godhead, or the Latins *persona* or *hypostasis* in the same way, do they use them so that we must fairly understand them as admitting a *numerical unity* of essence or attributes, or only a *specific unity* of the Godhead?

That a uniformity among the fathers, in the use of these terms, existed without exception, and that no inconsistency or inaccuracy in respect to the use of them can be found, is more than any one would undertake to prove, who knows how loosely many of the fathers have written, and how little the study of accuracy, in

the use of language, prevailed among them. Making only proper allowances for this, (allowances which must be made for modern as well as ancient times,) I think it can be shown that the view which I have given, in the paragraph of my Letters that occasioned this discussion, is substantially correct.

Tertullian, the earliest father who presents us with the terms *Person* and *Trinity*,\* in the passage quoted hereafter in these Letters more at length,† seems plainly to use the word *person* in the sense which I have attached to it. His antagonist Praxeas denied that there was any distinction in the Godhead, or any except a *verbal* one. "This perversity (*i.e.* of Praxeas) thinks itself," says Tertullian, "to be in possession of pure truth, while it supposes that we are to believe in one God, not otherwise than if we make the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost the self-same,—as if all were not one, —while all are of one, viz. *by a unity of substance.*"

Farther on he says, "I call him (the *Logos*) a *person*, and pay him reverence." And again, "We are baptized into the *persons* (of the Godhead) severally, by the use of their several names."

The key to this language is plainly to be found in the opinions of Praxeas, which denied any distinction in the Godhead. Tertullian means to assert it; to do which, he uses the word *person* and *persons*, while he expressly acknowledges a *unity* of substance. That this unity is *numerical*, and not *specific*, seems to me to be plainly indicated by the manner in which he expresses himself, —which is equivalent to saying, "About the *unity* of the Godhead as to *substance*, we do not dispute with

\* Lib. advers. Prax. c. 2.

† See page 31.

Praxeas—we only maintain that there is a distinction, which we call *person*, not inconsistent with such a unity.”

In regard to Origen, it has generally been thought that he maintained nothing more than a *specific* unity in the Godhead, while it is beyond a doubt that he asserts the existence of three hypostases.\* To ascertain in every case the exact meaning of words, in a writer who uses them so carelessly (sometimes, to appearance, inconsistently) as Origen does, would be a task difficult indeed to be performed. That he believed in the doctrine of the eternal generation and divinity of the Son, can scarcely be doubted, when the various assertions which he has made on this subject are compared together.† That the three hypostases which he predicates of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, do not imply *persons* in the sense of the word which is now common, may be inferred probably from what he says of the indivisibility of the divine nature. “God,” he says, “is altogether incorruptible, and simple, and composite, *not divisible*.”‡ Again: “The only-begotten, God our Saviour, the only-begotten of the Father, is Son by nature, not by adoption. He is born of the mind of the Father, as the will of the mind. For the *divine nature is not divisible, i.e.* of the unbegotten Father, *that we should think the Son is begotten by any division or diminution of his substance*.”§

While Origen, therefore, maintains the doctrine of three hypostases, or persons, he does it in such a sense as consists with the indivisibility, *i.e.* the numerical

\* See Com. in Johan. p. 24.

† See Bulli Op. pp. 105, &c.

‡ Lib. iv. cont. Cels. p. 169.

§ Lib. ii. in Johan. as cited by Pamphilus in Apolog.

unity of the Godhead. But to explain, or to justify all his speculations about the generation of the Son, is what I shall by no means attempt.

Cyprian, cotemporary with Origen, has little in his writings which concerns the present question. In his letter to Jubianus, however, after mentioning the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, he says, "These three are one;" and he afterwards speaks of Christ's "commanding to baptize into the full and one (*adunata*) Trinity."

Lactantius (about A.D. 300,) speaking of the Father and Son, says, "To each belongs one mind, one spirit, one *substance*."\*

The testimonies of the Antenicene fathers to the *eternity* of the Son, may be seen in the works of Bishop Bull, above referred to: but as they have not a determinate bearing upon the point in question, I pass them over.

Omitting the minor fathers, let us come to the Nicene Creed, the collected sense of the great body of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century. This declares the Son to be *ὁμοουσιος*, *consubstantial*, with the Father. Does this exclude or imply *numerical unity* of substance?

The meaning of the word *ὁμοουσιος* must be here investigated. Originally it was applied to things which belong to the same species, or have the same nature. Thus Aristotle calls the stars *ὁμοουσια*, *consubstantial*; and Chrysostom† says that Eve was *consubstantial*, *ὁμοουσιος*, with Adam. So the Pseudo Justin, in opposing some of Aristotle's doctrines, says, "In respect to a rational nature, angels and demons are *consubstantial*."

\* Lib. iv. c. 49.

† Hom. xvi. in Gen.

This word, however, was so seldom used by ecclesiastical writers, before the Council of Nice, in relation to the distinction in the Godhead, that the introduction of it has (though erroneously) been ascribed to that Council. But Origen (A. D. 230, Dial. cont. Marcion.) calls the *Logos consubstantial*; and Dionysius of Alexandria (A. D. 250) repeatedly uses the same appellation in respect to Christ.\*

Eusebius of Cesarea, one of the Nicene fathers, in addressing his Church about the Symbol of the Council of Nice, defends the use of the word *consubstantial* in their Creed, by saying that "he knew of some *ancient*, learned, and renowned doctors in the Churches who used it."†

It would seem, that before the Council of Nice, the word *ὁμοουσιος* had already come (as it certainly afterwards did,) to signify, as many used it, a *numerical unity of substance*. In such a sense, it compares with *ὁμοπατριος*, of the same Father; *ὁμογενης*, of the same nation; *ὁμοζυγος*, under the same yoke. Those who held to the doctrines of Sabellius, however, and Paul of Samosata, seem to have abused the word in order to perplex their opponents. It was on this ground that the Council of Antioch (A. D. 263) rejected the application of it to the Son,—not because they disbelieved, as the Reviewer would seem to intimate, the divine nature of Christ. The epistle, which six leading bishops of that Council addressed to Paul of Samosata before his excommunication, says, "that the Son . . . is God, not by foreknowledge, but in substance and hypostasis . . . we profess and preach.‡ Athanasius, stating the reason

\* Suicer in *ὁμοουσιος*.

† Athanas. Epist. ad Afr. tom. i. p. 987.

‡ Biblioth. Max. Pat. tom. iii. p. 349.



why this Council rejected the word *ὁμοουσιος*, says, that “Paul of Samosata affirmed, that if Christ were *consubstantial* with the Father, then it necessarily followed that there were three substances—one prior, and two posterior—derived from it. To avoid this sophism,” adds Athanasius, “those fathers very properly said that Christ was not *consubstantial*,—*i. e.* that the Father did not hold such a relation to the Son as Paul supposed.\* A similar account of the rejection of *consubstantial* by this Council is given by Basil.†

After all, however, it would seem that the ancient and modern writers, in their discussion of this subject, have mistaken the meaning of the Council of Antioch; and that they merely denied that Christ *κατα σαρκα*, *as to his human nature*, was consubstantial with the Father.‡

Neither Athanasius nor Basil, two of the most zealous and able defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity among all the ancient fathers, intimate, so far as I have been able to learn, the least suspicion that the Council of Antioch were Unitarians. It is very clear, from the passage above cited, that this Council believed in the divinity of Christ: and since these fathers lived so near the time when the Council in question was held, and were so jealous as well as earnest on the subject of Christ's divinity, it scarcely admits of a doubt, that the conclusion of the Reviewer in regard to the sentiments of this Council is erroneous.

Thus much for *ὁμοουσιος*, before the Council of Nice. In the Symbol which they drew up, the word was in-

\* Athanas. Op. tom. i. p. 919. † Op. tom. iii. Epist. ccc.

‡ See Doed. Inst. vol. i. § 115. c. and J. W. Feverlein de Concil. Antioc. there cited.

serted after much discussion and consideration. Many members of the Council were afraid that the same use might be made of it which Paul of Samosata had made. It was not until "after many questions and answers, and accurate investigation of the meaning of the term," says Eusebius, in writing an account of the Nicene Creed to his Church, "that it was admitted. Those who defended it," he goes on to say, "averred that it signified that the Son was of the substance of the Father, but *not a part* (or division) of the Father. To this sense," continues he, "it seemed proper we should assent."\*

In the same epistle, Eusebius says, that Constantine the Emperor, who was president of the Nicene Council, replied to some of the bishops, who made inquiry respecting the meaning of *ὁμοουσιος*, that "by it he did not mean that the Son was of the Father by any corporeal affections, nor by any division or separation (*αποτομην*); for it was impossible that an incorporeal, intellectual, immaterial nature should admit of corporeal affections (*i. e.* division or separation); but the thing was to be understood of a divine and incomprehensible manner," *i. e.* manner of relation between the Father and Son.

It seems to me quite plain, that the explanations of Eusebius and Constantine serve to show what they did *not* mean by *ὁμοουσιος*,—viz. that they did not mean to impugn the *numerical unity* of the divine substance, as they object to all idea of *separation* or *division*. *Specific unity*, however, not only admits, but demands a separation which destroys *numerical unity*.

\* Soc. Eccl. Hist. lib. i. c. 8.

The presumption, then, from these explanations, against the doctrine of mere specific unity being taught in the Nicene Creed, is pretty strong. It is very greatly increased, however, by the explanations which this Creed received fifty-six years afterwards, by the second ecumenical, or general Council, assembled at Constantinople, by order of Theodosius the Great, in order to restore peace to the Churches, which were rent by the Arian dispute, and specially to settle and establish the Nicene Symbol of faith. After meeting, and agreeing to receive and recommend the Nicene faith, with some small additions, made to oppose some new heresies which had arisen, they sent a Synodic epistle to the western Synod of Churches, who were to meet at Rome; in which they state, that, in accordance with the Nicene Creed and “the most ancient faith, and agreeable to baptism, they believe in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—so namely, that there is *one* divinity, power, and *substance* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; who possess equal dignity and co-eternal dominion; who exist in three most perfect *hypostases*, or three perfect *persons*;—so that the pest of Sabellius shall have no place, which confounds the persons, and takes away their appropriate qualities; nor the blasphemy of the Eunomians, Arians, and opposers of the Holy Spirit prevail, which destroys the substance and nature and divinity of the uncreated, consubstantial, and co-eternal Trinity, by introducing a posterior nature, of a different substance, and created.”\*

What in the Creed is expressed by *consubstantial*, they have here called “one (*μιας*) divinity, power, and

\* Theodoretī Eccl. Hist. lib. v. c. 9.

substance of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;" which is a direct and (as it appears to me) unequivocal assertion of *numerical unity*, and has so been understood, as far as I have learned, in all succeeding ages of the Church. It cannot admit of a doubt, I think, that they aimed to express the *ὁμοουσιον* of the Nicene fathers, by the *μιας ουσιας* of their epistle; and if so, then it is clear that they interpret the Nicene Creed as teaching *numerical unity* of substance, divinity, and power, *i. e.* substance and attributes, in the Godhead.

In this ecumenical Council were one hundred and fifty orthodox bishops assembled, besides a number who were attached to the sentiments of Macedonius. It is generally conceded that their decision gave an establishment and a uniformity to the Christian faith, about the doctrine of the Trinity, which remains, even to the present time, among the generality of Christians. This decision was so short a period after the Nicene Council, that some bishops present at Nice might be, and probably were, still living, and not improbably present at Constantinople. At any rate, the fathers of the Council of Constantinople can hardly be supposed to be ignorant of what the Nicene Council meant to express by *ὁμοουσιος*.

That the great body of Catholics and Protestants have maintained the *numerical unity* of the Godhead, will not, I suppose, be called in question. As little can it be called in question, that the great body of them have supposed that the Council of Nice meant to assert it. This Dr. Münscher concedes, in his very able attempt to show that the Nicene fathers meant to assert nothing more than a *specific unity* of the Godhead.\*

\* Untersuch, über den Sinn der Nic. Glaub.

Very few of the older theologians, in modern times, have called it in question, that the Nicene Creed implies *numerical unity*; and these have always been contradicted. Not only so, but some of the great masters of ecclesiastical lore have very recently avouched the opinion in question. Schroeckh, that consummate master of church-history and patristical learning says,\* in reference to the meaning of *ὁμοουσιος* in the Nicene Creed, "*It cannot be doubted that by this word no specific unity is meant, but a numerical unity in respect to being.*" So Walch, in his celebrated History of Heresies,† has decided; and Stark, in his History of Arianism,‡ has given the same opinion. I will not say there is no appeal from men of such distinguished learning as these; but I may say, that what they pronounce in an unqualified manner to be true, in a case which they have fully examined, when confirmed by general opinion, in all ages, and by very express and (as it seems to me) satisfactory evidence in ancient times, may at least be asserted by me without any special rashness; and may be said to be plain from church-history.

The bearing of this investigation about *numerical unity*, as implied or excluded by *ὁμοουσιος*, upon the question how the fathers used the word *person*, is very evident. A numerical unity being acknowledged, *person* can be used in reference to the Godhead, by no considerate man, in the *same sense* in which it is applied to men. It designates a *distinction* in the Godhead—a *distinction*, of course, in opposition to those who maintain that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are in

\* Kirchen Greschich. v. 344.

† 2 Th. s. 24.

‡ Berlin, 1786, 1. Th. s. 306, 307.



all respects identical, so far as they are divine. And when the fathers use *person*, can they use it but in "opposition to Sabellians and others of similar sentiments?" Most certainly the Arians did not deny that Father and Son were two hypostases. They maintained it in such a high sense as to exclude numerical unity of substance. When the Council of Constantinople affirm, therefore, that "God exists in three most perfect hypostases or perfect persons," they evidently mean to oppose Sabellius, as they proceed to say, "So that the pest of Sabellius shall have no place, *which confounds the persons*, and takes away their appropriate qualities—nor the blasphemy of the Eunomians, Arians, and opposers of the Holy Spirit prevail, which destroys the substance, and nature, and divinity of the uncreated, consubstantial, and co-eternal Trinity, by introducing a posterior nature, of a different substance, and created." The latter clause here is as if they had said, The Arians, &c. make two substances, natures, &c. of Christ and the Father, and the Macedonians explain away the being of the Spirit; but we maintain *numerical unity* (*μὴν οὐσίαν*) of substance or being, in opposition to these.

Such an explanation, by these fathers, of what the Nicene Council meant to oppose, seems to me to indicate that the Reviewer is not correct when he intimates that the Nicene fathers had not any particular reference to the errors of Sabellius. To oppose Arius was, no doubt, the *special* object of the Council. But then, in forming a creed, they naturally had reference to the disputes of the times in general. Dr. Münscher admits this. "The Nicene Council," says he, "recognized (*vorfand*) as decided, the doctrine of the Church, that

the Son of God is called God, and is entitled to divine honours. They recognized also the decision, established in opposition to the *Noetians and Sabellians*, that the Son or Logos is a proper hypostasis.\* “Certainly,” says Bishop Bull,† “it is *most clearly evident* (*liquidissimo constat*) that the Nicene fathers, in their creed, meant to impugn other heresies besides the Arian.” He proceeds to say, what is very evident to be sure, that many things are contained in the Creed which the Arians did not deny at all, and which must therefore refer to other sects.

I have proceeded as far in this examination as my present limits will allow. If I have justified the shape of the paragraph which the Reviewer has animadverted upon, given in the present edition, my special object is answered by this investigation.

Be this, however, as it may; as the great body of Trinitarians, since the Council of Constantinople, to say the least, have maintained the *numerical unity* of the Godhead, and as Mr. Channing cannot be supposed to have attacked the Trinitarianism of the fathers, but of the present day,—so the substance of all that was aimed at in the paragraph of the Letters under consideration, stands unimpeached. Trinitarians of modern times, maintaining the numerical unity of the Godhead, cannot, unless Mr. Channing supposes them to be most unreasonably self-contradictory, maintain that *person* does apply or can apply to the Godhead, in the latitude in which he understands it. The real question, therefore, as to the justice of his attack upon their opinions, is not affected by the sense in which

\* Untersuch, &c.

† Op. p. 114.

the fathers used the word *person*. The investigation of this question, however, may not be without some use. It may at least provoke a more diligent examination of the subject than has hitherto taken place among us. Should this be the case, the interests of truth may be promoted by it.

### POSTSCRIPT TO LETTER III.

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AFTER finishing the above Letter, your "Note for the second edition" came to hand. But as it seemed to me that most which it contained had already been anticipated, I did not think it of importance to change the shape of the Letter, and adapt it to your Note as well as Sermon. I was still less inclined to this, because I had endeavoured, as far as possible, to avoid giving any personal shape to the controversy; knowing how bitter and irrelevant to the original subject all controversies soon become, when personalities are admitted. I have not the most distant design of saying anything with a view to wound your personal sensibility; but I do feel, and I ought to feel, a deep interest in addressing the understanding and reason of a man who, by his weight of character, sobriety of mind, and eminent talents, has acquired so much influence in society as you have. And, in order to do this with propriety, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to throw the whole subject into the shape of a discussion respecting principles; and to avoid that form of writing which too commonly involves personal reflection.

Will you permit me, in this informal way, to add a few things, which the perusal of your Note has suggested to me?

I am unable to reconcile the first passage of your Note, with another in the body of your Sermon. In the former you say, "We are told by Trinitarians, that Jesus Christ is the supreme God, the same being as the Father, and that a leading end of Christianity is to reveal him in this character." In the latter you say, "According to this doctrine (*i. e.* the doctrine of the Trinity), there are three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. They perform different parts in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator, and not the Father. The Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed."

But how can Trinitarians maintain that Jesus Christ is the "*same being as the Father*," when a prominent trait of their doctrine is, that there is a *distinction* between him and the Father? You yourself represent them as holding this distinction to be equal to that



which exists between two different men. This indeed is incorrect ; but it is equally so to represent them as holding that Jesus Christ is the "*same being as the Father,*" if you mean by this, *in all respects the same.*

Nor can I see the propriety of the remark in your Note, that if Christ were "the same being as the Father, . . . we should expect to hear him continually spoken of as the Supreme God." For, *first*, are we to receive the Book of God as it is, or are we at liberty to insist that it must be conformed to our *expectations*? and *secondly*, if Christ was truly man (a point as certain as that Christ ever existed,) and was conversant in the *human nature* with men, how, in a book which gives us the history of what he said and did during his *incarnation*, should we expect to hear him continually spoken of as the *Supreme God*? The reasonableness of such an expectation seems to be at least very questionable.

In truth, the sacred writers do not appear to me to write as controversialists, on the subject of Christ's divinity. It is the way with men who have extravagant views of the importance of any particular subject, to be ever dwelling upon it, and taking occasion to introduce it as often as possible. Thus I have heard some preachers, who will not utter a single public discourse, or offer a single prayer, without letting it be known of all men, that they are *champions* for the doctrine of the Trinity. I have heard others, who never fail to let their hearers know that they are emancipated from the thralldom of the dark ages ; and have thrown off the shackles of creeds and confessions, and forms imposed by ignorant and bigoted men ; that they are enlightened and *reasonable* Christians ; and that their audience are

bound in duty to become their imitators. The holy Apostles, however, possessed, as I must believe, none of the spirit which prompts to either of these courses. They did not view the subjects in a distorted and sectarian light. The edifice of truth—the temple of the living God—rose under their hands not only into a lofty and magnificent structure, but into one which was as conspicuous for *symmetry* as for *grandeur*.

All parts of Christian doctrine held their proper place in the system which they taught. Why should they then be *continually* speaking of Christ as supreme God, when (as I verily believe) they expected no professed follower of Christ to call this doctrine in question? John seems to have had opponents to it in his eye, when he wrote the first verse of his gospel; but, excepting this, I do not remember another passage of the New Testament which has this aspect of opposition to gainsayers, in regard to the divinity of Christ. The Apostles doubtless expected to be believed, when they had *once* plainly asserted any thing. That they are not, is indeed to be lamented; but it cannot be charged to their fault. They felt (what we feel now) that very frequent, strong, and direct asseverations of any thing are apt to produce a suspicion in the minds of a hearer or reader, that the person making them has not arguments on which he relies, and so substitutes confident affirmations in their room; or that he is himself but imperfectly satisfied with the cause which he defends; or that he has sinister motives in view. For myself, I confess I am inclined to suspect a man of all these, who makes very frequent and confident asseverations.

I am the more satisfied, then, that the New Testament

treats the subject in question as one which was not controverted, and as one which was not expected to be called in question. My conclusion, from the Apostles' mode of treating it, is, I acknowledge, quite different from that which you draw, as stated in your Sermon and Notes. But, with my present views, I must think it to be more profitable than yours.

In regard to what follows in your Note, most of it has been anticipated. I will touch upon only a few points.

With respect to the passages which we adduce in proof of Christ's divine nature, you observe, that the "strength of the Trinitarian argument lies in those in which Jesus is called God." This may be true; but it lies in them, as I have from the first endeavoured to show, not simply because the name *God* is given to him, but because those things are ascribed to him as God, which no being but the supreme God can perform. *My whole argument is constructed on this ground; your whole Note, on the ground that we draw our conclusion simply from the fact, that the appellation God is given to Christ.*

What you say respecting the argument in favour of Christ's divine nature, from the *name given him* in Matt. i. 23, accords in the main with my own views. To maintain that the name *Immanuel* proves the doctrine in question, is a fallacious argument; although many Trinitarians have urged it. Jerusalem is called "Jehovah our righteousness." Is Jerusalem therefore *divine*?

Why should you say, in the third paragraph of your Note, that, in looking through "Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you meet with no instance in which Christ is called God?" Are there no proofs here of his omniscience, of his omnipotence, of his authority to forgive sin, of

his supreme, legislative right? And are not these things better proof of his divine nature than a mere name can be? Why, moreover, should such an invidious distinction be implied, to the prejudice of St. John's writings and of the Epistles? Do you not admit all the New Testament to be of divine origin and authority? Of what importance, then, is it, whether the doctrine of Christ's divinity is found in one part or another? Besides, if any disciple could know who the Lord in reality was, has any one a better claim to be considered as knowing it than John, the disciple "who leaned on Jesus' bosom."

You have passed the whole of John i. 1, with merely commenting on the name Θεός. My dear Sir, can you expect to satisfy candid inquirers with this? Are you not bound to tell us how this *Logos* (*word*) could *create the worlds* (τα πάντα, the universe,) before this text is disposed of? You must tell us how *creative power*—the highest, the distinguishing act of Deity, which constitutes the characteristic and prominent feature of the true God, in distinction from all false gods\*—can be *delegated*? When you can explain this, then you will bring us upon ground where we shall be unable to controvert the Gnostics, who denied that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Supreme God. *Inferior* power, they maintained, was competent to create the world. What less do they who ascribe *creation* to Christ, and yet reject his divinity?

Why should you pass over all that on which we rely for proof, and touch only that on which we do not profess to place confident reliance? I mean, why should

\* Isa. xl. 40, and onward.

you descant on the *name* God, and say nothing of the attributes and works ascribed to him who bears this name? If we should argue in the same manner with you, ought we to expect to convince you? Much less could we acquit our consciences of our obligation to represent the opinions of others fairly to the world, should we publish any thing by which we should endeavour to make them believe that *all* the evidence in favour of a particular doctrine held by many Christians consisted in that very thing *on which they did not rely*; or at most, in that which constituted merely but a part of their grounds of belief.

The simile from Plato and Socrates, I must think, is less happily chosen than your fine taste and cultivated mind commonly lead you to choose. In the same breath that you say, "Plato was in the beginning with Socrates, and was Socrates," you add, "that whoever saw and heard Plato, saw and heard, not Plato, but Socrates, and that as long as Plato lived, Socrates lived and taught:" that is, your first sentence would either be not at all understood, or understood, of course, in a sense totally different from that which you meant to convey, unless you added the commentary along with the sentence. St. John has indeed added a commentary; but this is, as *he means to call Christ* THE GOD WHO CREATED THE UNIVERSE. Of this commentary you have taken no notice: but of this you are bound to take notice, if you mean to convince those who differ from you, or to deal ingenuously with those whom you design to instruct.

On the texts, John xx. 28, Acts xx. 28, Rom. ix. 5, 1 Tim. iii. 16, Heb. i. 6, and John v. 20, I have already



said what I wish to say at present. The remarks in your Note do not seem to call for any new investigation.

You say (near the close of your Note), that you have "collected all the passages in the New Testament in which Jesus is *supposed* to be called God." The foregoing Letter, however, does represent us as *supposing* that there are *still more* in which he is called God,—although I have omitted many in which a multitude of Trinitarians have *supposed* that Christ is called God. Why should you affirm this, when nearly every book on the doctrine of the Trinity that ever has been published by Trinitarians, will contradict it?

You repeat also the assertion here, "that in two or three passages, the title (of God) may be given him (Christ); but in every case it is given in connexions and under circumstances which imply that it is not to be received in its highest and most literal sense."

But in no single instance have you noticed the "connexions and circumstances," in which the appellation *God* is bestowed on Christ. Can you reasonably expect your thinking readers will take this assertion upon credit? Are you not bound to prove to these same readers, *by the Scriptures, interpreted according to the universal laws of explaining human language*, that the New Testament writers have not ascribed to Christ CREATIVE power, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, divine worship, divine honours, and eternal existence? What are *names* in this dispute? Show that these *attributes* are NOT ascribed to Christ, and you make us Unitarians at once. You ought not to take the advantage of representing our arguments as consisting in that on which we do not place reliance; and then intimate to your readers, "This is all which Trinitarians have to

allege in their own favour." Dispute can never be terminated in this way. Meet fairly and openly the points in debate. Many of your readers are certainly too intelligent, and too conscientious, to be satisfied with any other course. Any other does not become your high character and distinguished talents.

THE END.

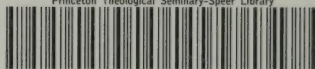


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